RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR RELIGIOUS SISTERHOODS

SKELLY

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To Very Rev Pius M. Driscoll O.P.
wishing him God's
blessing in the duties
of his arduous office
The author.

23rd March. 1927.

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for
RELIGIOUS SISTERHOODS

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for
RELIGIOUS SISTERHOODS

BY
THE REV. A. M. SKELLY, O.P.

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Fr. Jacobus Reginaldus Newell, O.P., S.T.L.,

Fr. Edwardus Cyprianus McDonnell, O.P., S.T.L.

IMPRIMI POTEST

Fr. A. L. McMahon, O.P., S.T.M.,

Prior Provincialis

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To

MY MOTHER

the Queen of Heaven,
through whose favor,
in spite of my many sins
and frailties,
I have been permitted to wear
the religious habit
for so many years,
this little work
is humbly and most affectionately
dedicated.

3705

FOREWORD

The writer in presenting the following pages to his readers considers that some words of explanation are required. These Retreat Conferences are simply a selection of addresses delivered at various times during the course of many years. Being himself a religious, having discharged, moreover, the office of retreat-master and confessor to religious for a great number of years, the author naturally devoted himself to this field of study.

In the course of conversation with missionary priests as well as with religious Sisters themselves, the remark was made to him repeatedly that while there is no dearth of works treating of the perfect life, most of them are unsatisfying; for, while, on the one hand, the really great works are often too tedious and exhaustive for our busy age, many of the others treat only in a defective and partial manner of the duties of the religious life, and the inquiry was often made as to whether the great questions

pertaining to the religious and the interior life could not be treated in a manner at once concise and comprehensive so as to meet the exigencies of the more active life of modern times.

In these pages that attempt has been made, —with what success we leave it to the Sisters and other enlightened readers to judge.

Should the present work be acceptable, the writer hopes to supplement it in the near future with three other volumes, entitled, respectively, *The Religious Life, The Interior Life* and *The Devotional Life.*

A. M. S.

Portland, Oregon.

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RETREAT CONFERENCES

FIRST CONFERENCE

THE GRACE OF A WELL-MADE RETREAT

I

1. We are assembled here this evening to commence in the name of God a most important work—a work that I trust is destined with His help to have a great influence on our future both in this world and in the next. We are assembled, in a word, to commence our annual retreat.

Now, a retreat is not to be looked on as one of the ordinary events that take place, as a matter of course, within the year. It is to be looked on rather as *the* great event of the year, in respect to which all the other events that take place within a convent, be they scholastic or religious, hold a secondary place. And the reason is at once obvious; for during the retreat graces are to be received, impressions are

to be made, resolutions are to be formed, a course of conduct is to be shaped,—all of which are to have effect during our whole after lives.

We are all of us, religious, like artists copying from a great original. Now, an artist when copying does not keep his eyes continually on the canvas. He raises them at intervals to study the original, to compare his work with it, and to correct any fault he may have fallen into in its execution, so that he may at length depict upon his canvas a true likeness of the masterpiece he designs to reproduce.

And so with us, dear Sisters. We are come here to copy in our thoughts, in our acts, in our lives, the great original, Jesus Christ. Our interior is the canvas whereon we are to delineate in their respective orders His virtues and divine excellences. Our exterior acts it is that give tone and body to the picture. If they are right, and if they are done with a right intention, they confer upon it grace and sublimity; but if they are done out of order, and with ill intention, they blot and mar the figure of the Crucified, who should stand out boldly in our characters and lives. We have, therefore, a very pressing necessity of laying down from time to time our pencil—of desisting from our

ordinary works, and studying our original—of comparing our lives with His, and of correcting discrepancies in our work, with the view of perfecting and beautifying more and more the effects of grace in our souls, and becoming more like our original, Jesus Christ, in sanctity and merit.

2. Besides, there is danger—mix up ever so little as we may with the world—of contracting some of its dust, of losing some of that purity of intention which should animate us and be the soul of our actions. The retreat is to remove that dust, and rectify our intentions, so that all our actions be done for God alone.

Dear Sisters, a true religious ought, like a mirror, to reflect on the world the loveliness and the perfection of the Almighty. A heavenly grace and beauty should be manifested in all her actions. To you are addressed in an especial manner the words of Jesus Christ: "You are the light of the world." You are to shed around you an atmosphere radiant with sanctity. In retreat especially, and in the deep reflections on the eternal truths that are put before you at such a time, you catch somewhat of those rays of holiness emanating from the throne of God.

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3. What effects of grace and sanctity have not been produced? what graces have not souls in all ages of the church received, in time of retreat? It was in retreat that were produced those great lights of sanctity that appeared at different periods of the Church's life, and made the age in which they lived illustrious by the splendor of their achievements. It was in retreat, in the solitude of the desert, away from the conversation of the world, that Moses received those gifts and was admitted to that familiarity with God that fitted him to be in after years the deliverer of his people. It was in retreat on Mount Carmel that Elias was gifted with the double power which made him like a divinity walking among men. It was in retreat that Daniel was favored with his greatest revelations. It was in retreat, in the wilderness, that St. John the Baptist was trained for his sublime office of precursor of the Saviour. It was in retreat, during the ten days following the Ascension, that the Apostles received the Holy Ghost, and were confirmed in their mission to be the propagators of the Gospel among all peoples. The most illustrious amongst the saints of the New Law

were those who had passed their youth in the desert, or who were accustomed to retire for long periods together to solitude and conversation with God. Such lifegiving powers are given as a result of a retreat well made! The retreat is, then, a great and salutary means of sanctification given by God and prescribed by the Church for the well-being of His chosen children.

Now, it is God who, through the direction of His Church invites you this evening to enter on your annual retreat. Don't doubt it, dear Sisters, He has, very special ends in view in calling you to it. He is greatly interested in its success. He has very precious lights and graces to impart to you if you make it well; that is to say, if you begin it with a true spirit of fervor and go through it with fidelity to the end. Enter, then, with great confidence and earnestness on this holy work, trusting that He who invites you to it will not fail to manifest His will to you, and give you grace to execute it.

4. And now, I bid you be not over-anxious if you do not feel at once that pliancy of will and that fervor in the exercises that you would

desire. Those will come with time and application. For, just as in other pursuits, there is a growth of love for, and interest in them, the result of application to them; so, also, there is, in time of retreat a growth in the soul of love for deep reflection and prayer which opens to us secrets we had not dreamt of, and which confers on us sentiments we had not before experienced; hence it is that many who at the commencement of retreat find themselves cold in affection and dissipated in thought, come out of it bathed in tenderness for God and filled with the most generous aspirations after virtue.

Don't be disheartened, then, if you do not find in yourself those generous dispositions that you would desire; nor, yet, at the remembrance of the apparent failure of past retreats, nor at your want of correspondence to grace during your religious life. Commit yourselves confidently to the Lord and His Sanctifying Spirit, "who breatheth when and where He willeth," and who by the touch of His breath warms up the coldest hearts. He will not fail to visit you during these privileged days, and bring you strength, love, and consolation.

II

1. But in order to this effect there are required you from at the outset two grand dispositions; namely, an entire recollection of spirit and a perfect docility of heart. You are to preserve an entire recollection of spirit; by this I mean that you are to withdraw your mind as far as may be from those worldly objects and scenes that surround you, or that have engaged your attention during the past year, and fix them on the contemplation of God and the things that concern your soul's eternal welfare.

The tumult of worldly concerns, be it never so faintly heard in time of prayer, troubles the peace of the soul, and deafens her ears to the voice of the Holy Spirit manifesting to her His will. Hence, the prophet Osee, speaking on the part of God to the beloved soul whom He would have entirely occupied with Him, says: "I will lead her into the desert and will there speak to her heart." And our Lord Himself gives us an example of this in His dealings with His disciples. For, holy as were the labors in which they were engaged in the work of the conversion of souls, He was

wont at times to take them away from the scene of their labors into solitude, saying to them: "Come for a little while into the desert to pray." And there with Jesus alone they gathered spiritual strength, and refitted themselves for the arduous work of the apostolate.

So you also, be with Jesus alone in the desert, away from all distracting concerns, even those holy ones that have occupied you during the past year. There you will gather strength to meet the trials that are to come.

2. And, secondly, you are to preserve a perfect docility of heart. This comprises three things,—fidelity to the rules, application to the exercises, and obedience to all the movements of grace. You are to show a generous zeal in fulfilling the orders of God. When the bell rings for any exercise, be prompt to respond to its call. Be diligent in the performance of all your duties, and generously lay aside all inordinate affection for worldly things, frequently repeating the words of the Psalmist: "My heart is ready, my heart is ready to do Thy will, O God."

3. Thus, in the silence of the soul, and the preparation of the heart, the gentle voice of the

Holy Spirit will not fail to come to you and make known to you His will. As it was said by God to the prophet of old: "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord; for, behold the Lord passeth." And the prophet ascended the Sacred Mount, as he was commanded, and he stood before the Lord in prayer. And he hid himself in the cleft of the rock for fear at the passage of God. And, behold, a great and strong wind came up from the plain, "overthrowing the rocks and breaking the mountain in pieces." And it was intimated: "The Lord is not in the whirlwind." And after the wind came an earthquake, rocking the land like the billowy ocean. "The Lord is not in the earthquake." And after the earthquake a fire swept along the hill, wrapping the reeds in conflagration. "The Lord is not in the fire." And after the fire the Lord "passed along as the whistling of a gentle air."

So, now, as in the days of the prophet Elias, "the Lord is not in the whirlwind" of worldly activity and bustle. "The Lord is not in the earthquake" shock of human events. "The Lord is not in the fire" of human passion. But He manifests Himself to those who "lift up their eyes towards the holy mountains,

whence help shall come," who by prayer stand in His sacred presence, and who "hide themselves in the cleft of the rock," in the open side of Jesus Christ, what time He passeth along "as the whistling of a gentle air," and He breatheth His will to those whose minds are recollected, and whose hearts are prepared.

SECOND CONFERENCE

THE RETREAT, A REMOTE PREPARATION FOR DEATH

I

1. Among the joys in the life of a missionary there is one, and it is not an inconsiderable one, neither was it unfelt by the great Apostle himself in his day. It is that of returning to the scene of his former labors and meeting once again those devoted souls who lavished favors on him in the past. And of that joy, I assure you, dear Sisters, I am sensible at this moment, and of an elation coming from the consciousness that I am in the presence of well-wishers and friends. Since I conducted a retreat for you last time a great many changes have taken place in the world. We ourselves are conscious of a change in our thoughts, in our views of life, in our ways.

What does all this bring home to us, except the great truth that "we have not here a lasting

city, but we seek one that is to come?" Yes, dear Sisters, the time approaches when it will be said to each one of us: "Give an account of thy stewardship, for now thou canst be steward no longer." The great day of death approaches, when "everyone will be rewarded according to his works." Today we are in the midst of the activities of life which, if gone through for God, can earn for us an everlasting crown. It behooves us, then, to employ the time well; for, "the night cometh when no man can work."

I would further remind you that the goods that we seem to possess here, and among them our very lives, are not our own, but belong to another. They are only entrusted to us for our use, and we ourselves are only as stewards administering them for God. It behooves us, then, to see that we administer them in accordance with the will of the great Householder. This is one of the ends of the retreat, that it be a preparation for death. In preparation for that great event we religious have not only our morning and evening meditations, and the examens, general and particular, and the weekly confessions, and the monthly adoration, but in all religious Institutes, by the will and com-

mand of the Church, we have also the annual retreat.

And this brings home to us the importance of the work we have entered on. It is a remote preparation for death, for the great account we shall have to give to God. Nay, it may be for some of us the last retreat of our lives. This is what makes these few days among the most precious in our lives, days that we are to go through with all the earnestness and all the ardor in our power.

2. There is a second reason why we should look on those days as most precious, and why we should employ them with the greatest fervor. It is that during them we are to fit out our lives and key them to the high vocation to which we are called. When we think of the sublimity of the religious life, that we are to lead lives worthy of the spouses of Jesus Christ, that we are associated with the holiest things in religion itself, that our lives are to be made conformable to that of Jesus Christ: when, moreover, we reflect that during the rest of the year we shall be engaged in the activities of a life mixed up more or less with the things of the world, and that the principles that are to regulate them are to be laid down and consoli-

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dated now, when we think of all those things we shall be convinced of the pressing earnestness we are to bring to the work of those days.

It is during the retreat that we are to consider anew and confirm ourselves in those convictions that originally led us to embrace the religious life, in order to prosecute that life with fervor and energy. What are those convictions, and what was the purpose that actuated us, or that at least ought to have actuated us, in the early days of our religious life? The reply to those questions is admirably given by St. Jane Frances de Chantal, in one of her instructions to her novices, which I shall now read for you.

"It is not everything," she says, "to come into religion. We must know why, for what end, and with what intent we came into religion. Your intention ought to be to unite yourself to God, and to separate yourself from the world." . . . "Once, again," she continues, "what is our congregation, and what have you come to do here, my daughters? It is said in our constitutions that religion is a Mount Calvary, and that we must continually mortify and destroy ourselves. You have quit the world, and your Heavenly Spouse causes you

to ascend after Him upon Calvary, where He allows Himself to be stripped, nailed, and crowned with thorns, to drink gall, to be completely despised, to have His side opened, in a word, thousands and millions of things painful and bitter to His Sacred Humanity. You must also suffer the same in religion. For, mark you, there are two points in this affair! First of all, you must destroy yourself; I mean you must labor courageously and faithfully for your perfection. Secondly, you must allow others to do it, permitting them to flay you, and strip and bend your hearts as much as they wish. If you resist, you will never be true spouses of Jesus Christ crucified. To make a happy household the inmates must live in harmony. If they wish to be blessed by Heaven, the husband and wife must have the same will and judgment. And I say to you also that you will be the true spouses of the Son of God only in as much as you crucify your will, your judgment, your inclination, in order to render them conformable to your Crucified Spouse. . . . Trust me, my daughters," she continues, "reserve nothing: slay all. The spirit of the world and of the flesh cannot remain with the spirit of religion and the spiritual life. You

must throw down the one in order to build up the other. You must give up your own judgment, your own will, your self-love. These are the three things you have most to labor for, as they are the most necessary. You must so go out of yourselves, place your lives so in the hands of those who are set over you, that they may twist you and bend you at their will. In a word, my daughters, I counsel you only those two things: destroy yourselves courageously; humbly and sweetly allow yourselves to be destroyed by those who are set over you."

II

1. It is not enough to know why we came into religion, we must know what must be done in order to profit well of it; and here again we will allow St. Chantal to speak.

"Know, my daughters, if you wish to profit by your vocation you must first of all try with all your power to know well the value of it, and to conceive of it a great esteem. Religion is an academy of all the virtues, of perfection and sanctity, and a right way to conduct our souls to a union with our Heavenly Spouse. It is the school of Jesus Christ, where he makes Him-

self the Master of our souls, and teaches them by means of inspirations, rules, and superiors, His desires and His will. Delight in this knowledge and love, and esteem your vocation. The second thing which I desire of you is fidelity in the least little observance, and the smallest practice of virtue. Make it a matter of conscience I do not say to be wanting in promptness in obeying, for this is a great fault, but even in failing in the smallest ordinance; and those things are so necessary for you that if you do not take up the faithful practice of these little virtues, you will never arrive at great and elevated ones. I desire above all that you be very humble, submissive, and obedient; for these are the true virtues of religious. Obedience is the eldest daughter of humility: you must practise it inviolably as far as it can be done. If you are not humble and obedient, you are only the ghosts of religious."

2. So far the spirit that must animate us and the purposes of our annual retreat. When a great liner arrives in port after having trodden the pathways of the deep, her crew busy themselves with dressing her out for future voyages. Her painters set themselves to deck out anew her hull, and masts, and smokestacks, stained

by winds and waters, and to make her an object of beauty and admiration. Her engineers look to every crank and rivet of her vast works and see that she is sound and seaworthy. If during the voyage she discovered any defect in her works or in her power, that defect is now removed and the whole of her interior is overhauled, to see that she is made secure and comfortable.

So also with us. Since your last annual retreat our planet has swung around the great central sphere, and we with it accompanied by our works, all of which should have reference to the carrying out of God's will. Our duty in these days of retreat should be to examine whether those activities of ours during the past year were in order, and whether they were gone through in a manner calculated to advance the great cause we have at heart,—the sanctification of our immortal souls. Whatever is found to have been defective in our conduct is to be corrected; and as to the future, we are to resolve so to regulate the needle of our intention that in all our works it will point to the north star of God's eternal will, and that we strive in all our works to advance His glory.

Let this be the determination of each one of

us today. The work before us during these days is an arduous, but at the same time a sweet and fruitful one. God will accompany us into "the desert." The Holy Ghost, the lover of souls, "will there speak to our hearts." Jesus, our most amiable Saviour, will be with us to teach us how to pray. Mary, His most holy Mother, will inspire us to form high and noble aspirations.

Our guardian angels and our patron saints will guide us in our ways, and help us with their prayers.

We on our part must be prepared to answer and say with the holy boy, Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth"; and with David: "My heart is ready, my heart is ready to do Thy will, O God."

THIRD CONFERENCE

THE NECESSITY OF PENANCE

I

1. You are assembled in this holy place, dear Sisters, under the happiest of auspices, to enter, as your rule directs, on the great work of your annual retreat. This holy duty of self-introspection, recollection, and prayer is necessary for us all, constituted as we are. For the lines of the supernatural character engraved on our souls are liable to become obscured in the rough-and-tumble of a busy life, if not touched up from time to time. And even as the engraver renews his work, not by the cutting of new lines, but by the deepening of the ones already chiseled; so, the supernatural character is renewed in our lives not by the taking on of new means of perfection, or by the hearing propounded new views of the supernatural life, but by the deepening of the impressions already received, and by the more

prolonged and deep reflection on the truths that originally produced them.

This is why we are not to look to the preacher for fresh and novel views of the religious life, but rather we are to reflect more deeply on the old, old truths he has given utterance to, it may be, in former retreats.

2. And now, dearly beloved, as to the fundamental disposition required for the making of a good and profitable retreat, let me say that it is a deep compunction of heart and sorrow for our past sins. The retreat is the seed-time of the soul—a seed-time which is to produce in after life the rich harvest of virtue. "The word is a seed," says the Divine Sower. And just as in Spring, the seed-time of the year, the farmer prepares the soil before he puts in the good seed which is to germinate and bear fruit; so, also, in this seed-time of the supernatural life, we are to plough the soil of our souls deep by penance and compunction for our past sins. "The Word is a seed." It needs a rich and congenial soil in order to produce a bountiful harvest of grace and merit. The Word is, moreover, "keen and penetrating as a two-edged sword," says the Apostle, so keen and so penetrating that it enters into the heart, and

"reaches even to the dividing of the Spirit," separating altogether the supernatural spirit, the interior life of the true religious, from the spirit and the ways of the world outside, and this it is principally through the spirit of asceticism that it fosters and engenders in the soul.

The fundamental disposition for making a good and profitable retreat is, then, a deep compunction of heart and sorrow for our past sins. This is why our Lord at the beginning of His preaching first called on the people to do penance. "Do penance," He said, "for the kingdom of God is at hand." And in all His teaching He inculcates the practice of penance as a suitable accompaniment of prayer and good works, which make up the totality of the religious life.

3. And now as to the practice of penance and compunction of heart, who shall say that it is not necessary for us all? Yes, it is necessary for us all. Just or sinners it is necessary for us all. It is necessary for sinners in order to make atonement to God for their past sins. It is necessary for the just as a preservative against sin, and as a remedy against the consequences of past sin.

It is, first of all, necessary to sinners. When we commit sin, we do two great evils. We outrage God whom we are bound by the strictest obligation to adore and serve, and we injure our own souls. We commit a daring outrage on God, I say, and the justice of God demands that that outrage be repaired, either by our acts of penance here below, united to the infinite satisfactions of Jesus Christ, or hereafter by an eternal punishment in hell. Ah, dearly beloved, what a merciful resource is not this that the Almighty has left us in the practice of penance—a resource the like of which He did not give the rebel angels, whom "in the twinkling of an eye" He cast into hell!

What a merciful resource is penance! For what proportion is there between the sufferings of the most austere penitent that ever lived and the slightest pain of hell which sin has merited? "Who hath known the power of Thy anger, O Lord," says David, terrified at the thought of hell.

And, oh, let the same thought nerve us all to the practice of a rigorous penance whilst God has still left it in our power. Yes, what comparison between the penitence of the few short years of our present life and the eternal chas-

tisements of hell? What are the most poignant sufferings that we can endure here to the tortures of those fires that shall never be extinguished? What is a tear or a sigh of the contrite heart to the unavailing regrets and everlasting despair of the damned? And yet this sigh, this tear of a heart sincerely touched, this short penance of the present life, can efface all sins, no matter how great they may be, and can disarm the anger of an avenging God: whilst torments extreme in their rigor and eternal in their duration can never appease the divine anger, or efface the least fault of the damned in hell.

4. The sinner, I have said, not only outrages God by sin; he, moreover, wounds his own soul. And that wound must be very deep indeed, since at the moment the soul sins it dies; that is to say, it loses the life of grace, the friendship of God and the right to heaven. "The soul that has sinned," says the Prophet Ezechiel, "the same shall die." At the moment it sins it becomes the slave of the devil and the object of Divine vengeance. What an evil, dear Sisters. And what the remedy! There is none other than Penance. It alone can gain access to the throne of mercy and

draw down upon us the precious grace that cures the wound of sin. It alone can avert the everlasting death, of which the soul's present spiritual death is but the forerunner and the cause. This, Eternal Truth Itself assures us of.

At the time that our Lord was preaching in Judea an awful occurrence took place in Jerusalem. A body of seditious men, called Zealots, under the leadership of one Judas, the Gaulonite, conspired against the Roman power. As is not unusual in such enterprises, the Roman authorities were kept fully acquainted with the movements of the conspirators; and when the time seemed ripe for action, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor—the same who afterwards crucified our Lord—sent a body of his legionaries down upon them as they were offering sacrifice in the Temple and cut them to pieces to the last man. The affair caused a tremendous sensation in Jerusalem and throughout all the surrounding country. And, as was customary with the Jews, they began to inquire what crime had these men committed that they drew upon themselves such a calamity: for the Jews always consorted temporal misfortunes of every kind with sin. Our

Lord, who knew so well how to apply the moral of passing events to the subject of His discourses, assured them that on account of no special sin had they brought this catastrophe on themselves. And He concludes, "You have sinned as well as they. Unless, therefore, you do penance you shall all likewise perish."

And on this point, I would direct your attention to the full force of the words of our Saviour, as taken notice of by commentators of Scripture. According to them, these words have the same force and meaning as those other words concerning Baptism, spoken by our Lord to Nicodemus: "Unless a man be born again (to God, by Baptism) he shall never enter the kingdom of heaven." Now Baptism is so necessary for the effacing of original sin, according to these words of our Saviour and the infallible decrees of the Council of Trent, that the infant that dies without it, though through no fault of its own, can never see God. Even so, I say, the man who, having committed mortal sin, dies without doing penance, either through his want of will or his want of time, can never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Penance, therefore, to the sinner,

like Baptism to the infant, is absolutely necessary for salvation. "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish."

II

1. But penance is necessary not only to the sinner, but also to the just. It is necessary to the just as a preservative against sin, and as a remedy against the consequences of past sins. It is the same with maladies of the soul as it is with those of the body. The former may be said to be a figure of the latter. Now although we may be cured of a grievous bodily sickness, there ordinarily remains in our constitution, as a result of it, a certain languor, which disposes us for a return of the malady. Against this we have to take precautions. So also, sin, whether it be actual, and is remitted in confession, or original, and is remitted by Baptism, leaves in the soul a certain languor, which disposes it for new falls. It is a wound which, though healed, leaves a dangerous scar behind. And this scar will again become raw unless we continually use a preservative. Now the best and only preservative against the recrudes-

cence of sin in the soul is penance. It is a preservative which sustains the soul and keeps it in perfect health.

In fact, dearly beloved, whence is the source of our sin? Alas! it is within us, says St. Paul. "There is a law in our members which continually carries on war against the law of our mind." It is our concupiscence, that fell and shameful fire that smolders within us, and that is easily enkindled by the presence of objects to which it has an affinity. We must keep down this smoldering fire of concupiscence by drenching it in the tears of penance. We must, moreover, renounce those objects that tend to entice us to the indulgence of sinful pleasures; that is, the occasions of sin. We must go farther still and deny ourselves not only forbidden pleasures, but even those that are permitted, if only to train ourselves in the practice of self-denial. For how, otherwise, can we resist that inclination that draws us so powerfully to evil?

2. Besides, who so just that has not fallen into many venial sins? Now these venial sins, like mortal ones, are in their degree so many outrages against God and merit a proportionate punishment. This punishment must be

undergone either in this life, by a voluntary penance, or hereafter, in the fires of Purgatory. And is it not wiser to expiate our sins by a salutary penance here, where mercy tempers justice, and good works are not only satisfactory, but also meritorious, than to leave them till the hereafter, when suffering will be satisfactory alone, and justice rigorous and unflinching, shall be dealt us?

3. Do penance, therefore, dear Sisters. Renounce sin; chastise your bodies: pour forth the tears of compunction before the Lord. Just or sinners; penance is necessary to all—to sinners that they may avert the anger of God and obtain anew the life of their souls—to the just that they may persevere in justice and avoid the punishment to come. Imitate those great penitents spoken of in Scripture and who have been raised up by God to be models to all mankind. See David: he fell but once, and he remained a penitent all his life. He himself tells us what were those penitential works he practised. "I nightly wash my bed; I bedew my couch with tears; I have mingled ashes with my bread, and my tears with my drink, till my flesh became withered and my skin hath cleaved to my bones." He

cried out continually to the Lord: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquities. Wash me more and more from my iniquities, and cleanse me from my sin; for I know my sin and my iniquity is always before me."

See Peter, who denied His Master. For that sin he wept till his eyes became as living fountains, and the tears furrowed his cheeks, even as the streamlet makes for itself a bed amid the hard limestone. See St. John the Baptist, the holiest of the children of men, the greatest of the prophets, the most perfect of the just, spend his life in the desert. What picture more sublime than that of the Evangelist describing his penitential life? "And that same John had his garment of camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey." See St. Paul. He tells us that he was not conscious of the presence of sin upon his soul, and yet he exercised upon himself a most severe penance. "I so run," he says, "not as at an uncertainty. I so fight, not as one beating the air, for I know my enemy; but I chastise my body and bring

it under subjection, lest while I preach to others I myself become a castaway."

Imitate those noble penitents, I say. Pour forth your sorrow before that God who "will never despise a contrite and humble heart," and who has sworn in Scripture to forget the injuries done Him by the penitent sinner. Thus, here below, keeping your souls in subjection to the law of God, and renouncing the law of sin, you will "avoid the wrath to come," grow in grace, and merit an exceeding great reward. As it is said, "The short and light tribulations of the present life bear no comparison to the exceeding weight of glory that shall be revealed in us."

FOURTH CONFERENCE

THE LABORING FOR OUR SALVATION

I

1. Once, when our Lord was preaching by the Lake of Genezereth He ascended a ship and from thence taught the multitude. And when He had ceased to speak He said to the master of the ship—he was Simon Peter—: "Launch out into the deep, and let down your net for a draught."

And Simon answering said to Him: "Master we have labored all the night and have taken nothing: but at Thy word I will let down the net."

It was the reply of a sad and disappointed man. How sad and how disappointed you may gather as you look into the faces of those good men whom you see in fishing stations around the coast, as they tell you in reply to your inquiry that "there's no fish in the bay." For the disciples, too, like the fishermen of our

time and country, had wives and families to support, and a return from sea without catches often meant for them and their little ones short rations and the pinch of poverty.

Moreover, it is an ungrateful task to be obliged to labor hard and long, and to get no return for one's pains; to spend a wakeful night upon the waves, and to return in the morning empty-handed. Striking figure of the plight at death of those who have labored during life for the things that concern this world, and who have neglected the great business of their eternal salvation.

For the stormy Sea of Galilee with its sudden gusts and its treacherous waves is a type of the great world, where we are hustled about by many adverse currents of thought and action; where storms of passion and the jarring interests of a multitude of individuals often threaten our destruction. And the time of life may be compared to a long night, where we labor in the obscurity of faith and in expectation of the dawn of the great day of eternity. And many will have to answer the Lord with St. Peter, as He meets them on the shores of the Eternal Kingdom: "Master, we have labored all the night of our lives on the tumultuous ocean of

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the world, and we bring with us to your tribunal nothing of value for eternity, because we have labored solely for the things of time."

2. This being so, I take occasion from this reply of St. Peter to address you today on the importance of laboring for our eternal salvation.

And I say, first of all, that the laboring for the salvation of our soul *is essentially the business of our lives.* This is clear to anyone who considers, be it ever so little, the great fact of our existence. Here we find ourselves in the midst of life. Forty, sixty, a hundred years ago, we were not; and now we are. What is the purpose of our being? What, our end? We find ourselves endowed with the highest gifts of body and soul—gifts which raise us infinitely above the creatures that surround us, and which beget in us a likeness to God Himself. With body erect, face fronting heaven, we bear upon our brow the impress and the dignity of lords of creation. Our soul was made to the very image and likeness of God. Spiritual like Him, intelligent like Him, it has before it an eternal destiny.

Moreover, this soul of ours is gifted with transcendent powers—the faculties of mind

and free will. The mind is capable of highest thought. It compasses all space and time. One instant it measures the movements and considers the qualities of the farthest spheres; another, it goes back to the beginning of time and studies primordial matter as it comes forth from the hand of the Creator; now it reasons on the most hidden mysteries of nature; or again, it lifts itself on high and contemplates God upon His throne.

Our will, offspring of God's most generous love, earth holds it not. It rises above all temporal things and aspires after the possession of the Supreme Good. By our free will we are raised infinitely above inanimate things and the brute creation, and are gifted with a true sovereignty over our actions. The ones are subject to invariable laws which they must obey; the others are impelled by invincible instinct in their operations. Only man has the power to will or not to will; to direct all his actions to an end.

3. Now, coming thus from God, thus gifted by Him, still subject to Him by the most absolute dependency, the question is borne in upon us: What could be the purpose of the existence of creatures such as we? Has God sent us into

this world to do as we please? Has He given us permission to employ those heaven-born faculties of mind and will as every impulse may dictate, thus making His image which we are, the votaries of whatever idol passion may set up in the altar of our soul?

No, this cannot be, dearly beloved; for God is infinitely wise. He must, therefore, have an end and an infinitely wise one in view in our creation. What is that end? What is the purpose that actuated the mind of God when He said: "Let us make man to our own image and likeness?" He has declared it in the first of His Commandments: "Thou shalt adore the Lord, thy God; Him only shalt thou serve." This being so, it follows that the business of our life is to carry out the purpose of our existence, to love and serve God, and thus to save our soul.

II

1. *It is the business of our life* I say. The business that is of the most importance to us is that whose success or failure is for us of the greatest consequence. Now, of what consequence to us is the affair of our salvation? It

concerns our all, for body, for soul, for time, and for eternity.

If you gain salvation, you shall have gained all—riches, pleasures, honors, which surpass all our thoughts and all our dreams of fancy, and which the man who gains them can neither comprehend nor imagine; but if you fail in gaining salvation—ah, my dear sisters, you shall have lost all. You shall have lost your soul, purchased by the Blood of Jesus Christ. You shall have lost the Sovereign Good for whom you were created, and in losing Him you shall have fallen into evils infinite and eternal. See the issues that are at stake, dear Sisters, in this matter of Eternal Salvation. And yet, to see the conduct of the greater part of men would not one say that salvation is only a trifle, useful indeed for occupying the thoughts of clerics and pious women, but unworthy of the attention of serious people living in the world? What do people do ordinarily for the salvation of their souls, from morning to evening, from year's end to year's end, from childhood to old age? They rise in the morning. What is their first thought? How many have only criminal ones? Some say a few prayers morning and evening. How many say none? If

they do pray, how do they do it? Half waking, half asleep, dressing and undressing. They speak to God with as little respect as they would to a beggar. As to the rest of the day, they think no more of God or of their souls than if they had none.

Go to the crowded market place. Go to the assemblies of pleasure or business. You see care or enjoyment pictured on every countenance. Inquire, as the angels of God inquire, how many in that crowd are thinking of the great work of their salvation.

But, at least Sundays and festivals will be days devoted to the work of laboring for salvation? Alas, you know it; you see it as well as I. Those holy days are, for the greater part even of Catholics, none other than days of amusement and profane occupation, if not indeed of sinful and degrading pleasure.

2. Nothing in the world is more neglected than the laboring for salvation. If a man has a business house or an office in town, he visits it often. If he has a farm, he cultivates it all the year round. If he has a worldly enterprise on hand, a law-suit in court, he thinks of it night and day. It is only of his poor soul that

he takes little or no account. We are told unceasingly that it was for our salvation that God sent His Son into the world, and that for it He died. Yet unhappy ones that they are, they regard with supreme indifference that which was the cause of the Incarnation and the Passion and death of Jesus Christ.

III

1. Oh let us at least be wise, and to this effect, let us reflect lastly, that the salvation of our soul is not only our most important, *it is our only business.* We have only one soul. That soul is our real self, our true being. Hence, we have only one thing to do, and that is, to save it. When the angel led Lot and his wife and children out of the city of Sodom, which was about to be destroyed for its corruption, he said to him: "Fly from this hateful place! Save thy own soul!" It is the same that I have to say to you, for fear that you may perish in the midst of the corruption of the world, of which Sodom was a figure. "Save your own soul!" Save yourself! If you had two souls, you could risk one in order to con-

tent your passion; but as you have only one, my dear Sisters, if you lose it, all is lost for you. Let all your care then be to save it.

Such was the conduct of the Royal Prophet as he tells us in that beautiful psalm that we recite so often in the Divine Office. *"Anima mea in manibus meis semper.*—My soul is always in my hands."

2. There is this difference between things that come within the compass of our sight or hearing and those that we hold in our hands: that, whereas we easily forget the former, the latter are always within immediate call of our memory. A man, for instance, looks at himself in a mirror. As soon as he retires, "he forgets what manner of man he is." Another hears a song. Scarcely has the sound died upon his ear when he forgets the words and even the air of it. But it is not so with what he holds in his hands; not, mark you, in his hand as a lady holds her satchel; and what he is glad to hold. He not only sees it, but he holds it in such a way that it cannot readily be taken from him. Such was the disposition of David. Nothing was dearer to him than his soul. This is why he says that he holds it in his hands, not only for some time, but "always." His soul

was the great object of his cares. Nor did he lose the remembrance of its interests either by day or by night, whether he looked after the interests of the great and extensive kingdom that he ruled, or whether he took the necessary rest or recreation, the thought of laboring for his salvation returned unceasingly to his mind. And thus ages beforehand he carried out the great principle formulated by St. Paul for Christians: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else do, do all for the glory of God," and for the salvation of your soul.

And this great principle we too should act upon, so that it should never be laid to our charge that our works, our studies, our amusements, our relaxations, our projects, and our whole lives, cannot at least mediately be referred to the great work for which we were sent into the world—of laboring for our salvation.

3. Let this be the resolution that we make today, touched by the word of our blessed Lord. If then we have been in the past remiss in laboring for our eternal salvation, if we have been little impressed with the importance of this great work, oh, let us now at least, in God's name, and at the word of Jesus Christ

set ourselves to it with all our heart. Let us let down the net of our intention and desire, and fish zealously for the things of God. Nay, let us at the same word of the Lord, launch out into the deep where the great fishes play, by withdrawing from the pleasures and conveniences of the world. Let us launch out into the spiritual and sacramental life of the Church, by giving ourselves generously and unreservedly to the service of God; for there alone shall we draw in the abundant life of our souls, grace, and merit, and salvation.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

THE END OF MAN

"And I spoke with my tongue and I said: 'O Lord make known to me my end and what is the number of my days that I may know what is wanting to me.'"

1

1. In these words the holy king, David, besought the Lord for the grace to have a right apprehension of the purpose for which he had received his being and all other gifts from God. 'Twas not that he was ignorant of God's designs upon him: he knew right well by faith that God made him for Himself alone. But living as he was in the midst of the activity and dissipation of a court, this wise and holy king feared that his heart might go astray and be wholly taken up with worldly cares and pleasures. He therefore lifted his soul in prayer to God and besought Him to keep before him continually and efficaciously the eternal end

appointed for him at his creation, to the attaining of which all his thoughts and all his efforts should be directed.

Dearly beloved Sisters, we also have need at times to consider profoundly and to bring home to ourselves the end of our being. For, although we may not be reared amid the seductions of a court, nor have the cares of an empire to occupy us, yet, how many distracting cares and occupations to take up our thoughts and engross our solicitudes day by day! How many vexations and annoyances harry our minds and drag us down to mean and selfish ways and aspirations! How many passions and temptations solicit the worship of our heart and try to usurp that sanctuary of our affections which was made for God alone! Oh, yes, we also have need of calling upon the Lord, and of begging Him to keep before us continually and efficaciously our end and the things that we are wanting in, so that we may aspire with greater ardor and put forth stronger efforts for its attainment.

What then is that end?

Religion taught you from your earliest childhood that we were made to know and love, and serve God here on earth, and to see and enjoy

Him forever in Heaven. Let me try to illustrate this answer of the Catechism by recalling to your minds the circumstances of our creation, and the gifts with which God originally endowed us.

When we take up the Bible, its first words tell us that "in the beginning God created heaven and earth." From these opening words of Scripture our minds are carried spontaneously to the period that preceded the dawn of that creation, and in an ectasy of thought we contemplate the Godhead living alone, self-existent, immense, unchangeable, perfect, standing in need of no created being to perfect His bliss.

A period arrives when this eternal God begins to act externally. He speaks, and at the voice of His omnipotent word, "the powers of heaven," the immense army of the stars, get into position and begin their revolutions on the illimitable field of space. He commands the sea to be contained within its bounds, and with a rush the waters of the great deep fly to the places destined for them and are chained within the hollows of the earth. He gives orders for the "living creatures having life," and in time earth, and air, and sea, and stream,

teem with multitudinous forms of animated beings.

But now on the sixth day something so great, so important, is to take place that the Almighty seems to pause in the work of creation; the Blessed Trinity deliberates. And as the result of that august counsel, the Almighty decrees to make man, and to make him to His own image and likeness. "Let us make man, and let us make him to our own image and likeness."

Who and what is this creature who is to crown the works of God, and for whom all the beings that were yet made were but a preparation? Who is this being who is to bear upon him the impress of God's own likeness, and who is to be the image and representative of God on earth? We are that being, dearly beloved. Yes, the infinite mind of God contemplated each one of us. He contemplated you and He contemplated me when He said: "Let us make man." It is in that divine decree that is to be found the cause of our existence. "He made us, and not we ourselves."

2. And now as we contemplate our being as it comes forth from the hand of God: how

many perfections do we not find lavished upon it! How many gifts of body and soul!

But laying aside the consideration of all other endowments, are we not particularly struck with the consciousness of the possession of two transcendent faculties, the faculties of mind and of free will?

I see that by this mind we are capable of knowing all earthly things, of grasping all natural sciences; I see that by it we are capable of rising beyond the sphere of merely natural things and penetrating into the regions of faith; of soaring on the wings of contemplation; of sweeping on through worlds of revelation till at last we repose at the foot of the throne of God Himself.

I find again that this will of ours is not circumscribed to the love of merely earthly things. Nay, all earthly objects together, the riches of every clime, the highest honors, the most entrancing pleasures cannot satisfy its craving. The possession of the infinite God alone can fill the vast capacity of its affective power.

Coming thus from God, thus gifted by Him, still subject to Him by the most absolute dependency, the question arises: What could be

the end for which God created us? Has He sent us into this world to do as we please? Has He given us permission to employ those heaven-born faculties of mind and will as every impulse may dictate, thus making His image which we are the votaries of whatever idol passion may set up on the altar of our souls?

No, this cannot be; for God is infinitely wise. He must, therefore, have an end and an infinitely wise one in view in making us. What is that end? What is the purpose that actuated God when He said: Let us make man to our own image and likeness!

He has declared it in the first of His Commandments: "Thou shalt adore the Lord, thy God; Him only shalt thou serve";—a commandment which brings us back again to the words of our Catechism. "We were made to know, and love, and serve God here on earth, and to see and enjoy Him forever in the life to come."

3. And, oh, how good of God, dearly beloved, to ordain us for such an end! No, the Almighty Himself all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving though He be, could not devise or ordain for us a nobler end. For, there is no being so great as God; and we were made to

know, to love, to serve—what do I say?—we were made to see God face to face, to enjoy Him forever in the Kingdom of His glory; to possess God in the highest manner that it is possible for a finite and created being to possess Him; to see His essence; to love Him with the whole capacity of our being; to be absorbed and lost in the ocean of His love; and to be loved by Him in return with all the astonishing ardor of the Godhead. After this, let those tumultuous passions that would draw us to their service be put to silence! Let them be gone! Let all earthly ends with us be subservient to the one end for which alone we were made—to love and serve God; to fulfill His holy will here on earth, that we may merit to enjoy Him in the life to come.

II

1. And now I want to direct your attention in a particular manner to a thing which, of course, you all know, but which may not, perhaps, have made the impression on you that it might, and that is that the Almighty has made the enjoyment of Him hereafter contingent on our faithful love and service of Him

here. Of course God could, if He wished, have raised us at our creation to the glory of the blessed: but it was not His will to do so. On the contrary, He made beatitude the prize of virtue; or, as the Apostle has it: He made it a "crown of justice," that is to say, a crown due in justice for labor in His service. We are then to attain our end as a reward of virtue. 'Twill be our own and none other's. A fool may sit on a throne bequeathed him by an illustrious ancestry. It will not be so with us. We must win our crown. To this effect He requires of us a faithful fulfillment of the divine law which He has given us. This fulfillment of the divine law; this service of the Lord which is to be rewarded hereafter with a crown of glory—what is it? It is the observance of the Commandments which are nothing else than the sum of our duties to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves. This He tells us in every page of Scripture. "If thou wilt attain thy eternal end," He says to the young man in the Gospel, "keep the Commandments." "Keep faithfully," says the Lord to us by Moses, "Keep faithfully the Commandments which the Lord, your God, has given you; and let them be graven on your

heart; and you shall tell them to your children; and you shall meditate upon them, sitting in your house, and walking on your journey, at night in the intervals of sleep, and in the morning on your waking." In a word, "You shall have them continually before your eyes." "Keep the Commandments which the Lord, your God, has given you." On this condition, and on this alone, shall you attain eternal life. Meditate upon them, sleeping, and waking, at home in your houses, and at your labor in the fields. "Have them continually before your eyes."

2. Before I leave this point, I will put a little question to each one of you, and I will leave you the next few days to meditate upon it in the closet of your heart; and if you cannot solve it satisfactorily, it will be the business of your whole life, hereafter, to make up for your deficiency.

The question for each one of you to put to yourself is this: "As I look back on my past career since the time I came to the use of reason, can I lay my hand on my heart and say that, to the best of my abilities I have kept the Commandments? Have I loved, served, and worshipped God alone? Have I paid due

reverence to His Holy Name? Have I sanctified the Lord's day by attending devoutly at Mass and by abstaining from servile works? Have I been an obedient, dutiful daughter, and at all times given due honor to my parents? Have I kept my soul chaste and refrained from all manner of evil thoughts, words, and works? Have I kept each and all of the other Commandments?"

Enough, O God of Knowledge! Thou overwhelmest us with the most superficial scrutiny, of our lives. And O God, as we cast a glance upon that black and dreary past, what a hideous portent rises to our memories! Is there a single Commandment that we have kept—a single precept that we have not many times transgressed? Is there a single virtue that we can say in truth we practised?—a single faculty of body or soul that we have not profaned and subjected to the service of the devil?

Alas, dear Lord, we must confess that we began to be sinners from our earliest youth. Every power of body and soul has been perverted—mind, and will, and memory, and imagination; eyes, and ears, and tongue, and lips,

and hands, and feet, and our whole persons have been desecrated by sin.

3. And, as we scan that dark and wicked past, can we, oh, can we plead in excuse our weakness, our temptations, or the difficulties of fulfilling the holy code of the Commandments? Alas, we stand self-condemned. For, did not God give us a thousand lights and graces? And when we were yet infants, did He not put the seal of His election on us in calling us to the Catholic faith? Did He not give us Catholic parents to form us in virtue? When we grew up did He not give us good and zealous pastors to impart to us His holy truths? Did He not strengthen us with His Sacraments—penance to raise us up when we were fallen, and the Blessed Eucharist, His own most precious Body and Blood, to be the food of our souls? And yet, in spite of all this, we fell, and fell miserably.

4. But, after all, we shall not be confounded. No, for we have an "Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ, the Just." He, our loving Redeemer, makes intercession for us, and will even now, if we be truly contrite, obtain for us remission for the past, and hope for the future.

Thanks to His powerful intercession, He procured for us this retreat which we now begin to understand the meaning of. It is a time of amnesty, of pardon, for contrite souls.

Enter, then, with zeal on the holy exercises of this retreat. Who knows in which of them the grace of your sanctification may be obtained? Prepare to make a good confession—a worthy Communion. Lay the solid foundation of a better future by a true contrition for your sins. Make good resolutions for the government of your lives hereafter. Lay aside all leaning for the false honors, the perishable riches, the base pleasures of the present life. Aspire after the true goods of life eternal, your true end. Thus will you obtain a true and lasting happiness here, and the hope of a blessed eternity, hereafter.

SIXTH CONFERENCE

NATURE OF MORTAL SIN

1. In the first chapter of Isaias the Prophet gives utterance to the following words: "Hear, O ye Heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken!" And what is this thing that is worthy, in the estimation of the prophet, of the astonished attention of Heaven and earth? It is the ingratitude and contempt meted out by men to God in return for all His goodness and mercies to them. "I have brought up children and exalted them, and they have despised Me!" And He contrasts their base action towards Him with the conduct of dumb animals towards their masters. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass, his master's crib; but Israel doth not know Me, and My people hath not understood."

He proceeds: "Woe to the sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a wicked seed, ungracious children! They have forsaken the Lord. They have blasphemed the Holy One

of Israel. They have gone away backwards!" (Is. I. 2–4).

2. Now it is of mortal sin, the wicked act of those ungrateful ones, that I wish to speak to you today, and in doing so the first thing that is incumbent on me, is to define my subject.

What is mortal sin? It is defined in the Catechism to be "a grievous offence against God, which deprives the soul of sanctifying grace, and deserves hell."

In this conference let me confine myself to the exposition of the first member of the definition. "It is a grievous offence against God." Mortal sin is a grievous offence against God; that is to say, it is an injury dealt Him by the sinner, who assails Him in a most unworthy manner. That offence is great, nay, infinite in its malice, for it attempts nothing less than the destruction of the Eternal. It assails His attributes. It disputes His authority, His sovereignty, His unity; and by so doing it would, were it possible, work the destruction of the Almighty.

To show you this more clearly, let me lay down what is of faith and say that the nature of God is perfectly simple—that His attributes are inseparable from one another and from His

nature, with which they form one thing. He together with them forms but one sole, ever-abiding perfection, one almighty power, one all-governing authority, one infinite Being.

Now, what do you do when in your folly you commit a mortal sin? You resist the authority of God. You make your own will and pleasure the object of your actions. You dispute the very fundamental prerogative of God as Sovereign of all—His dominion over your actions as His creatures; and as such, I say, you make an attempt upon the very life of God Himself. Of this we have an example in the conduct of the first sinner, who in the very precincts of Heaven itself set up the standard of revolt and disputed the right of the Almighty as Sovereign of all. "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God," says Satan; "I will sit on the mountain of the covenant on the north side. I will ascend above the height of the clouds. I will be like to the Most High." And when the Sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ was proposed to the angels by the Eternal Father as an object of worship and obedience, he rose up amid the ranks of his rebellious followers and said with insolence: "I will not serve!"

This is the attitude of every sinner who has committed mortal sin, from that first uprising of Satan and his followers in Heaven, down to the disobedience of our First Parents in Paradise; down to the wicked act of the youngest culprit who has this day opposed his will to the will of the Almighty.

3. I have said that mortal sin is an attempt against the life of God. And so it is; were sin to have its way, God Himself, the principle of all things, would be no more. Aye, and would to Heaven it had not been so successful as it has been! For in very truth it has taken the life of God away; not, indeed, His essential life, which is His by the very force of His being; but the temporal life, which the Son of God assumed for love of us. It has taken that life away. When He came down from Heaven to live amongst us, mortal sin with ruthless hand and murderous design put Him to a cruel death. Ah, dear Sisters, see what mortal sin has done. It has taken away the life of the innocent Lamb of God, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

When our first father, Adam, went out into the fields and came upon the body of Abel, whom his brother Cain had murdered, seeing

him bathed in his blood, the living color of his countenance effaced, his eyes glazed, his limbs stark in death, he was so stricken that he seemed beside himself with grief, and knowing that he was the cause of the evil, and that by his disobedience he had brought death into the world, he redoubled his penitential exercises.

Dear Sisters, when we enter into this chapel and see hanging on the cross the figure of our Saviour, covered with Blood, crowned with thorns, the light of His eyes extinguished, His hands and feet dug through with nails, and His life blood issuing from His side, how may we not weep over our past lives, knowing that it was our sins that reduced Him to this pitiable condition?

Yes, for it was not Adam's sin alone that did this injury to the Saviour. We also were represented there when Christ was slain for sin. We were there when the Saviour was so afflicted in the Garden of Gethsemani that His Sacred Blood was made to issue through every pore of His Sacred Body. Our sins it was that drugged the chalice of His Passion with the poisoned draught of hell. Our mortal sins were there when the soul of the Saviour was so charged with sorrow that He was constrained

to cry out: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." Our mortal sins it was that urged on His executioners to lay on Him unheard-of tortures. It was our sins that caused His body to be scourged till His very ribs were laid bare with the leaded whips of the soldiers. It was our sins that pierced His venerable brow with thorns, that nailed Him to His cross, and, finally, brought Him to the shameful death of Calvary. O dearly beloved, see what injuries our sins have done to God! We have nailed Him to the cross. We have taken away the life of Him to whom all things owe their being. Should we not weep, therefore, and do penance for our sins, aye, with greater earnestness than Adam did; since we have before us the daily evidence of its sad effects?

4. But this is not all, for we have the inspired testimony of St. Paul that by our sins we "crucify again the Son of God." How is this? It is because of the pain He feels at being offended by His own after all the sufferings He endured in order to achieve our Redemption. Yes, our sins renew the ignominies of His Passion, and tear open once again the wound then inflicted on His Sacred Heart.

It is then, to the sinful soul, that the Saviour

addresses this complaint that He made to St. Paul on the road to Damascus: "Why dost thou persecute Me?" Ah, listen to that tender reproach of the Saviour: "Why dost thou persecute Me?" You persecute Me more cruelly than did that infidel prince who ravaged the treasures of My temple. You destroy in yourself by sin the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the precious treasures of grace which cost Me so much to purchase for you. You persecute Me in my dwelling place. Herod drove Me from Bethlehem; you expel Me from your heart, which I had sanctified and wherein I had proposed to dwell. You persecute Me in my honor. Pilate put Me in comparison with Barabbas. You put Me on an equality—with what? with a vile creature satisfaction, and you prefer it to Me. You persecute Me in my person. The soldiers crucified Me only once. They knew not what they did. You crucify Me every time you offend Me mortally, and you know right well the evil that you do. You disregard My laws. You care not for my promises or threats. You fear not to displease Me, who am your Father and Saviour. You persecute Me in spite of the ancient love that I testified to you

in My Incarnation and Passion, and you do it for the satisfaction of a passion unworthy of you. Yes, mortal sin is a grievous and a bitter offence against the Lord, our God.

See then, dear Sisters, that you cultivate a great, a lifelong compunction for sin. And if you find that in your past life you have been so happy as never to have fallen into mortal sin, thank God daily for this grace. Imitate the saints by doing penance to propitiate God for the sins of a wicked world, that you may console Jesus Christ in His Passion, remove yourself more and more from this great obstacle to your sanctification, and prepare yourself for a union of love with God for all eternity.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

EFFECTS OF MORTAL SIN

I

1. In our last meditation we considered mortal sin in its nature and as an offence against God; and we saw how grievous an offense it is. Today we go on to reflect on the effects of mortal sin; as they regard the sinner.

The definition of mortal sin continues: "which deprives the soul of sanctifying grace and deserves hell."

By the commission of mortal sin, then, the sinner brings two grievous penalties on himself. He loses sanctifying grace, and he deserves hell. That I may show you how grievous are those penalties, let me first premise that we, the just, here possess two important supernatural goods. The first supernatural good that we enjoy is the life of our soul. I do not mean its physical life which cannot be taken away from us, because the soul was cre-

ated to live forever; but its supernatural life —an altogether divine life, which consists in sanctifying grace, and without which, according to our Lord Himself, we would be in a worse condition than if we had never been born. This sanctifying grace, together with the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost which are inseparable from it, gives to our soul a supernatural life which renders it so beautiful, so charming in the eyes of God, that He carries His love for it to an inconceivable degree. He looks upon it as His well-beloved and dear daughter. Jesus Christ treats it as His spouse. The Holy Ghost dwells in it as His sanctuary. It is infinitely pleasing to Him. He loves it, as He tells us, "with an everlasting love."

To this, our first supernatural good—to the happy state of a soul in grace—a second is added, which is incomparably greater still, and it is the right to eternal glory. From the moment a soul enters the state of grace it becomes an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. Its name is written in the Book of Life. There are waiting for it in the mansions of God a throne and a crown. Moreover, for every good work that it does there are awarded it so many new

gems that shall shine for all ages in the superb diadem with which it shall be crowned. To this effect an account is kept of all, even its smallest actions that are done for God. A glass of cold water given to the poor, a holy thought, a pious desire, a good wish,—all are marked in the book of merits. "A single hair does not fall from the head of the just man"; that is to say, according to the interpreters of Scripture, that he does no good work however small it may appear, of which there is not kept an exact account. What treasures of merit, therefore, cannot a soul in the state of grace amass in the space of fifty or sixty years?

2. But, alas! dearly beloved, there is need of only a single mortal sin to deprive such a soul entirely of so many goods, and to render it poor and naked and miserable. Yes, by a single mortal sin, its beauty is changed into a deformity so frightful that nothing is capable of giving us a just idea of it. Holy Scripture makes use of some comparisons to show us how great is the deformity of a soul in the state of sin; but there is nothing in nature that approaches it. It speaks of the blackness of coal; it speaks of cauldrons filled with blood; it speaks of mildews and cesspools; but what

are all these in comparison to the horror of a soul in sin? It is true also that it compares the state of the sinful soul to that of the devils, assuring us that a soul in mortal sin is not only like a devil, but that it is itself a devil. "Do I not call you My disciples, and yet one of you is a devil?"

Oh, unhappy you then if you were ever in the state of mortal sin. You carried devils within you. You were yourselves devils. It is our Lord Himself that says so. It was a devil then that made you act. It was a devil that saw by your eyes. It was a devil that spoke by your tongue. It was a devil that walked by your feet. It was a devil that acted by your hand. Great God, what a frightful state! Hence the horror that God has for a soul in the state of mortal sin; a horror so great and incomprehensible that if His mercy did not withhold His avenging arm, He would squelch that cursed soul the moment it committed its act of sin.

Ah, it is at that fell moment that it loses all its riches, that it is stripped of all its ornaments! It is at that moment that its name is blotted out of the Book of Life; and that the place that had been marked for it is given to

another. It is at that same moment that the devils write its name in the book of the damned, and that they mark its place in the abyss, that they celebrate a festival after their own fashion, and that they rejoice in their new conquest. It is at this sad moment that the Holy Ghost is cast out from that criminal soul, and that the devils are installed in it, and make it their abode. And how do they treat it? They bind it; they put it in chains; they buffet it; they make it the object of their sport; they treat it as the vilest slave.

3. Such is, dear Sisters, the deplorable state of a soul fallen from grace into the state of mortal sin. Behold all the designs of God in regard to it overturned! Behold the Passion and Death of the Saviour rendered useless! Behold the image of the Creator defaced by His enemies! And what are the sentiments of the angels and saints when they see a just soul, a friend of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ, an esteemed heir of Heaven, their dear companion, the object of their love and complacency, that poor soul, fallen into the state of mortal sin! Ah, if their state permitted it, how would they not lament and sigh! Their joy would be changed into grief. Their songs of gladness

would cease. The courts of the Almighty would resound with funereal notes, and Heaven would become a place of tears and woe.

II

1. But terrible as are the evils of sin with regard to the present life, they are as nothing when compared to those that have regard to the life to come. Pay attention to what I am about to say, dearly beloved. God is infinitely good, just, and merciful. You cannot doubt it. These are so many articles of our faith. Nevertheless, this God, infinitely good, just, and merciful, full of tenderness and love—this God, I say, for a single mortal sin condemns a soul to hell. Yes, for a wilful impure thought; for a criminal desire; for a bad action which lasts only for a moment; for a wilful omission of an essential duty: for this single sin, which has passed like a lightning flash; which has given him who committed it only the satisfaction of a moment; and which has left him only regrets and remorse of conscience; God condemns this soul, which is His image; His creature; His child—He condemns it to hell.

And what is hell? Ah, how terrible is the answer! Hell is the accumulation of all evils. It is the privation of all good. It is the treasure house of the anger of the Almighty. It is an abyss of fire; a frightful dungeon where are enchained the state prisoners of the Sovereign King. It is a region where everlasting horror and confusion dwell. It is an abode where the damned suffer a raging hunger, and a burning thirst; an excessive heat, and an insupportable cold; pains, and torments, and fury, and despair, which cannot be conceived or explained; and this without solace, without respite, without hope. But what is inconceivably beyond all thought, is that all these evils, all these torments, are eternal; that is to say, truly infinite in their duration.

2. Oh, mortal sin, how terrible you are! Oh, abyss of evil! And, oh, deplorable blindness and fury of those who commit it without scruple or remorse, and who afterwards laugh and divert themselves, and treat it as if it were a trifle and a thing of no account.

Let me tell you that on account of it it was necessary that one of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity should satisfy for it. Consider well this which I am about to say. There

is nothing more convincing, and at the same time more terrifying. If God had created a hundred thousand worlds, and if He had peopled each of them with millions of personages as holy as St. John the Baptist, nay, as perfect as the Holy Mother of God, they could never, by their good works and penance, satisfy the justice of God outraged by a single mortal sin. And the reason is that mortal sin contains an infinite malice, and all the satisfactions of creatures could never reach the infinite. It was only the humiliations and sufferings of a God made Man that was capable of making this atonement.

3. At the sight of those astonishing truths, what can we do but humble and annihilate ourselves before the Supreme Majesty. Yes, if we have committed only a single mortal sin in our lives, we may be assured that we have done an evil which is infinitely greater than all possible creatures could remedy. It was only the humiliations and sufferings of a Man-God that were capable of making this satisfaction.

Should it not be enough to throw us into despair to consider that we have committed such sins, not to speak of the hundreds, the thousands, perhaps, that we have been guilty

of,—had we not the happiness of hoping in the mercy of our Heavenly Father, which surpasses all our malice? But we can count upon this mercy only in as far as we sincerely repent of our past sins, and as we practise true penance.

This is the firm resolution that we ought to make as the practical conclusion of the extraordinary truths we have been considering. It is only as the result of this resolution that we shall find grace before the Lord and the reward of true penitence.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

TEPIDITY
ITS NATURE AND THE HATRED GOD BEARS IT

"So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (*Rom. VI, 2.*)

I

1. These words were addressed by St. Paul to those Romans, who had been lately converted from paganism by the preaching of the Gospel. The Apostle would have them consider themselves, now that they were called to the true religion, as persons already dead to sinful works, which had so engrossed them in the past, and devoted to a new and more perfect life by the practice of the Christian virtues.

And we also should regard these words as addressed to ourselves, since we are inheritors of the same faith, and sharers in the same

graces as were formerly conferred on the early Christians of Rome. We, I say, should regard ourselves as persons dead to sinful works, since we are called to a new and more excellent method of life of union with God, through the mediation of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We should be divorced in affection from sin, even as the dead are separated from human things which so engross the lovers of the world.

Now, dearly beloved, I am aware that good religious as you are, you have no affection for works that cause the death of the soul. But can the same be said with regard to those minor imperfections that so blur and spoil the beauty of the Christian life, and impede the assimilating action of the Holy Ghost, who would have us be perfect with a perfection in some way like that of the Heavenly Father Himself?

I purpose, therefore, to address you today on the habit of venial sin, or, tepidity, a habit that prevents us from living this perfect life with God which the Apostle would have us consider ourselves as called to.

And this I do for three reasons: First, because people ordinarily make very little account of this kind of sin, and, consequently,

they allow themselves to fall into it easily and without scruple; secondly, because if we have a horror of venial sin, we shall be far removed, indeed, from the commission of mortal sin; and, lastly, because the habit of venial sin forms what is called the state of tepidity, a state very dangerous to the soul, and one which is very often the cause of eternal reprobation.

2. Sin in general may be described as a want of rectitude in one's conduct. It is a thought, a word, an action, an omission, contrary to the law of God. When the faults we are guilty of against the divine precepts, or against our conscience, are in a considerable matter and fully wilful, they constitute mortal sin, which merits hell. When those offenses are in a small matter, or when the consent of the will is not entire and perfect in regard to a considerable matter, the sin is only venial, and does not merit eternal punishment. Mortal sin, repeated, forms the habit of sin; and venial sin, multiplied, constitutes the state of tepidity.

3. Now, as mortal sin is said to bring about in our soul what death brings about in our body, we may say, by a like analogy, that venial sin effects in our soul what sickness effects in our body. This general analogy being as-

serted, allow me to direct your attention to the points of resemblance.

A sick person has ordinarily little appetite for food. He takes nourishment without relish, and the little that he does take, merely serves to sustain life. The tepid soul, the soul addicted to venial sin, receives spiritual nourishment only with repugnance and in meager quantity. She withdraws herself, for instance, from prayer, from pious reading, from meditation on divine truths, from the Sacraments of Penance and of Holy Communion as much as she can; and if she does receive these Sacraments, it is without devotion and without desire.

Again, the Word of God is our spiritual food. If the tepid soul comes to hear this Word of God, she listens to it with so much indolence and so little desire to profit by it that it makes little or no impression on her. The heart of the tepid man or woman is as a great thoroughfare where pass and repass incessantly worldly thoughts and concerns, which prevent the assimilating action of this heavenly doctrine, and hence the soul is neglected and languishes for want in the midst of plenty.

Once again, a sick person labors only with

difficulty, and the little that he does accomplish is imperfect and often worthless. A tepid soul, a spiritual invalid, acts with so much negligence in her spiritual duties that all her works are more or less valueless. In order to see this you have only to observe a person given up to tepidity in the different circumstances of life and in the performance of the duties of her state. If she prays, it is with continual distraction. If she assists at devotions or Mass, she is seen in the posture of one who does not seem to know or to heed what she is about. At one time she nods, or yawns; at another, her eyes are wandering. She allows her mind to be filled with a thousand trifles. She cannot bear to be in the presence of God. If she receives the Sacraments, it is without the desire of becoming better. If she takes the least care when approaching them, it is only the habit of going on certain days that induces her to do so. If she labors in the employments of her state, it is without thought of God and without any supernatural intention.

4. Lastly, sickness entirely changes the person who is afflicted with it. It destroys personal beauty; it undermines strength; it brings on the effects of old age. It weakens the

mind; it impairs the memory; it clogs the reason. Everything becomes a burden to the sufferer. This is what happens to those who have fallen into the state of tepidity, a spiritual sickness far more terrible in its effects than the sickness that affects the body. All the powers of their souls are weakened by it, and they become so changed from what they were, that we can scarcely recognize them for the same persons that they had been.

Go into the sick room. You see there one who before now had a fresh color, rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes, robust limbs. Before now he was active; he toiled without difficulty. Now he seems a mere skeleton, and so deformed that one can scarcely look on him without shuddering. Observe the tepid soul. Before now she was charming in the eyes of God. She was brilliant as the sun. She flew under the wings of grace. Nothing seemed difficult to her in the service of God. Now she is ugly and deformed, filled with pride and selfishness, and she seems only the shadow of what she was. The practice of virtue seems irksome to her, and, in a word, it would seem that she only awaits a strong temptation to sink into the state of death, which is mortal sin.

II

1. Such is the state of tepidity—a state of sickness so disagreeable to God that He compares it to, and even seems to put it below, the state of death, which is mortal sin.

The third chapter of the Apocalypse furnishes us with an undoubted proof of this. Here are the very words of the sacred writer: "Write," says Jesus Christ, speaking to His servant, St. John the Evangelist. "Write to the angel [that is, to the Bishop] of Laodicea. These things saith the faithful and true Witness who is the beginning of the creation of God: 'I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.' "

Who could have believed that the state of the tepid soul was so dangerous, and, at the same time, so injurious to God, if the Saviour Himself had not assured us of it? It is a state so dangerous and so offensive to God that perseverance in it points to utter rejection and abandonment by Him. This is the natural comment on those final words of the Saviour:

"I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth."

2. I know, indeed, that this passage bears explanation; that, absolutely speaking, mortal sin, which causes death to the soul, is an infinitely greater evil than is venial sin, which only renders it sick; but I know also that the state of mortal sin is ordinarily less removed from amendment, and, consequently, from salvation, than that of tepidity.

The man in mortal sin fears the justice of God. He trembles at the thought of death, of judgment, of hell. Remorse eats him up. His conscience allows him no rest, but makes him enter into himself, conceive a lively sorrow for his faults, go to confession, and return to God by a severe penance. The tepid man, on the contrary, looks on himself as perfect. He thinks he has no need of amendment. He despises, or, at least, he neglects all the remedies of his soul, and thus he leads a languid life which ever tends to the final goal of mortal sin.

Oh, then, dearly beloved, let us recognize the gravity of venial sin, and fear, hate, and avoid it, so that, leading an inoffensive life, we may retain God's friendship here, and make secure our predestination and election to His Eternal Kingdom hereafter.

NINTH CONFERENCE

EVIL EFFECTS OF TEPIDITY

1. In that famous message that our Lord in the Apocalypse addressed to the Bishop of Laodicea, he exhibits great anger against him and disapproval of his conduct. Now, as the only fault laid to the charge of this bishop was that he led a tepid life and failed to come up to the standard of holiness demanded of him by his state, it is worth considering why it is that tepidity is so hateful to God.

Well, we find in the first place, that tepidity brings about the loss of numberless souls dear to Jesus Christ; hence, He hates it as the cause of their loss. Tepidity is, as I have already said, a sickness of the soul. It is a very grievous sickness and one that is well nigh incurable.

Many of you, doubtless, have seen persons attacked with the insidious and languid form of disease which they call phthisis, or consumption, who continue always to progress towards death, whilst those who labor under far more

violent disorders recover. Well, tepidity is a sort of spiritual consumption, and its tendencies are the same as the bodily one. We often see great sinners converted, become perfect penitents, enter with admirable courage on the career of a mortified life, and persevere in it in spite of every obstacle. But when have you seen the tepid in the service of God become better? Do they not, on the contrary, go from bad to worse, and, after having hobbled along for a while in the state of grace, come by sad and shameful falls?

What makes the state of the tepid more hopeless still is that, having become accustomed to commit venial sin without scruple, they become in time callous to mortal sin. It is with this fatal blindness, the result of a long-continued habit of tepidity, that our Lord reproaches the Bishop of Laodicea. "You say that you are full of spiritual goods," says He, "and that you are in want of no one; but you know not that you are poor, and blind, and miserable, and despoiled of all things." Behold the true state of tepid souls. They are full of presumption. They do not wish to receive advice. Correction appears irksome to them. They believe themselves to be above the rest

of men; and thus being unwilling to receive the proper remedies, they languish in their infirmities and run with great strides to death.

Behold, then, in what sense our Lord prefers the state of mortal sin to that of tepidity: "I would that thou wert cold or hot." Behold the first reason why tepidity is so hateful to God. It is because it robs Him of more souls almost than the state of coldness, or mortal sin.

2. A second cause of God's hatred of tepidity is drawn from the insolence with which the tepid treat His adorable Majesty, and His sensitiveness to those insolences.

There is nothing so calculated to cause estrangement between friends—I should rather say, there is nothing so calculated to change friendship into enmity, as insolence and discourtesy. We are the more sensitive to conduct of this kind when the offender has been the recipient of many favors from us, or when he is inferior to us in rank or talents. What would you think of a subject who had lost his respect, though it be in small things, for his superior? Mothers and sisters, you know it. If the children in your school, or, it may be, your servants, said offensive words to you, made cutting remarks about you, gave you

back answers, offended you continually, though lightly, would you stand it? Would you say it made no matter so long as they did not make an attempt on your life? How, then, shall God suffer Himself to be offended continually by worms of earth, and, what is infinitely more painful to Him, by His own children and subjects, by those whom He has loaded with all kinds of benefits?

It is of this ingratitude on the part of those He loves that He complains, seeming to feel the continual discourtesy of His friends more keenly than the assaults of His enemies. "If my enemy had done me an injury I would have borne it without complaint; but you who pretend to be my disciple and my friend; you who have taken sweetmeats together with me, you offend me at every moment; you mock me, and yet you seem to look upon treatment of this kind as a trifle, and you wish that I bear it without complaint."

3. Lastly, tepidity sullies the beauty of the soul, which is the temple of God. We know how much God loves the beauty of the Christian soul, and what great sacrifices He made to enrich and beautify her. This alone makes known to us with what sorrow and chagrin He

must witness the entrance into her of habits of venial sin.

What an affront would it not be to any one of you, dear Sisters, if after having gone to great trouble in improving and decorating your home, it may be on the occasion of some great solemnity, a person came from the street and destroyed the results of all your labors, scattered mud on your walls, overturned your furniture, and threatened your own expulsion? This is the very thing that the habit of venial sin does. It bespatters the Christian soul, which is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and compels Him by degrees to abandon her.

The habit of venial sin is then no light offense against God. It robs Him of innumerable souls that are very dear to Him. It is a wilful contempt of His Majesty. It destroys the effect of His operations in the soul.

4. Venial sin is an evil greater than all other evils save mortal sin. Venial sin by its malice works an injury on God which surpasses all the power of creatures to remedy. Hence, it is never lawful to commit it. Yes, were there question of preventing the ruin of entire cities, and the desolation of whole provinces, of procuring the conversion of all sinners, of opening

Purgatory and admitting to Heaven the suffering souls, aye, even of rescuing from hell all the damned, it would never be lawful to commit a single venial sin, to tell a single lie, to commit any fault, however slight it may be, because sin, though venial, outrages God Himself and contains as a consequence an incomprehensible evil, an evil which surpasses all other created evils.

How prodigious then is our blindness, we who "drink in (venial) sin like water"; who reckon as nothing the frightful number of venial sins of which our lives are but a tissue; who fill with them all our days; and who, far from making a scruple of them, seem to take pleasure in the thought of having committed them!

Let it be the aim of your lives, then, dear Sisters, to make war on this monster of tepidity; to banish it from your souls; to pursue it with relentless hostility.

Put ye on truly the Lord, Jesus Christ, by the perfection of your lives, so that living soberly, piously, holily, you may become true imitators of God—as it is said: "Be ye perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."

TENTH CONFERENCE

EVILS BROUGHT ABOUT BY TEPIDITY

1. In my former discourse on tepidity I explained its nature, the hatred God bears it, and the cause of that hatred. Today I shall confine myself to the consideration of the evil effects that flow from it.

In the first place, tepidity causes the withdrawal from us of the graces and favors of Heaven. In the days of our fervor, when we labor earnestly to become perfect, God makes it His delight to dwell in our souls. In those days He fills us with joy. He enriches us with His gifts. He pours out upon us an abundance of spiritual consolations. But in time of tepidity He withdraws in a manner from us, and if He does not entirely abandon us, He makes us feel that He stays with us only with pain. He does to us what would do a guest treated coldly and neglectfully in the house of his friend. What would you do if, when staying in the house of a friend, that friend af-

fected a cold and distant behavior towards you, kept away designedly from you, and seemed not to care to associate with you? Would you not begin to think that you were an unwelcome visitor, and prepare forthwith to take your departure?

Well, it is in this manner that the tepid soul treats God. She does not speak to Him. She does not care to entertain herself with Him. She dreams only of the follies and amusements of the world. And God, seeing Himself neglected and despised, begins to withdraw Himself from this ungrateful soul, and in withdrawing Himself He takes with Him His consolations and His graces.

From this partial withdrawal of graces comes the difficulty to that soul of fulfilling the duties of her state. She begins to feel within herself a great discontent, and a disgust for her employments and the practice of good works. She has no attraction for prayer. She cannot remain in the presence of God. She dare not enter into herself, because she finds there only desolation. And this in turn drives her to seek consolations abroad.

2. As a result of this withdrawal of grace and of the state of soul that it induces, come

an almost entire neglect of good works and the consequent loss of merit; and this is the second effect of tepidity.

The Prophet Joel compares sin—and this comparison applies in proportion to the habit of venial sins, which forms the state of tepidity—he compares sins to locusts, and slugs, and caterpillars, and those other noxious creatures that destroy the fruits of the earth.

Now, in hot countries, such as that in which the prophet lived, nothing causes more dreadful ravages than these creatures. You see a charming crop that promises an abundant harvest; you see a delicious garden stocked with flowers, and vegetables and shrubs laden with growing fruits. But if the locusts come down upon it, if the grub and the caterpillar infest it, to what a state do they not reduce it? To look upon it would you not say that fire had passed over it, or that springtime had been changed into the most frightful winter?

The Spouse in the Canticles makes another comparison which is no less striking. He likens the faithful soul to an agreeable and fertile vineyard, and represents venial sins under the similitude of little foxes which desolate and despoil it. Now there are no animals that do

greater damage to vineyards than foxes. They eat a great deal of the grapes. They knock down and destroy a great deal more. Besides, they introduce themselves so stealthily that it is only with great difficulty that they can be discovered.

When a soul is in the state of fervor she is like a field that promises an abundant harvest, a highly cultivated garden, a fruitful vineyard. But if the foxes enter in, if the locust, and the slug, and the caterpillar, make themselves masters of her; if that soul fall into the state of tepidity, her beauty is tarnished; the flowers of her good thoughts and purposes fade; the fruits of her good works are dissipated; she becomes an object of disgust and annoyance to her Master, and she has to wait but for a time, to be finally abandoned by Him. And this is the last effect of tepidity that I will speak of in this discourse.

3. As one does not arrive all at once at the summit of perfection; so, neither does one descend all at once to the abyss of impenitence, and there are for the one and the other many steps by which to mount or to descend.

As to perfection, one ordinarily commences by faithful correspondence to a holy inspira-

tion, to a good thought. From this he goes on to another. He becomes accustomed little by little to hear the voice of Heaven and to execute its orders. He contracts a habit of doing good. The horror which he has for sin becomes continually greater. He ascends from virtue to virtue. Penance becomes familiar to him. He declares war against the enemies of his salvation. And, finally, abundance of grace uniting itself to the repetition of good works and the acquirement of good habits, he finds himself in the state of sanctity.

To descend into the abyss of spiritual blindness and impenitence one takes an entirely opposite course. He advances little by little in the way of perdition. He commences with small infidelities. He listens to temptation in little things and yields to it. The devil does not at first solicit to great crimes him whom he has resolved to conquer. He is content to make him relax his first fervor. He makes him believe that it is not necessary to do such violence to one's self in order to be saved. Afterwards he persuades him that venial sin is but a trifle; that mortal sin is easily forgiven. Thus the unfortunate victim becomes the sport of the enemy and does all that he suggests.

This enchainment of venial sin leads to mortal sin. Repeated mortal sin produces the *habit* of sin. Hence, come spiritual blindness, hardness of heart, and the irreparable loss of the soul. Thus, from small beginnings one arrives by degrees at final impenitence and rejection by God.

O dearly beloved, let us give heed in time to little faults. Let us caulk the little chinks, lest, if neglected, they may in time sink the good ship of our soul, and we suffer shipwreck of our salvation. Mindful of those evil effects that proceed from unchecked habits of venial sin let us continually watch over ourselves. Keep away from dangerous occasions and strive to lead a perfect life.

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

TEPIDITY, EVILS AND CHASTISEMENTS

I

1. We have already considered the nature of tepidity, the injury it does to God, and its evil effects on our soul. What remains but that I lay before you some examples of the evils brought about by venial faults, and of the punishments God inflicts on those who are guilty of them.

And, first of all, consider that the fall of man was brought about by what was in the commencement only a venial infidelity. Adam at first only listened to the suggestion of his wife tempting him, a suggestion that he should have utterly rejected on the instant. He cast a look of curiosity on the forbidden fruit. This was only a slight fault. But this first infidelity led to entire consent, and the unfortunate man ate the forbidden morsel, which has brought desolation on the world. Solo-

mon had at first only a little too great fondness for his wives, and how did this complacency end? Who could have believed it of the wisest of men? It ended in his abandoning the worship of the true God and offering incense to idols. Judas had in the commencement only a little too great love of money, of which he was the custodian for our Lord and his fellow Apostles. This little attachment degenerated in time into a true avarice, and this avarice drove him to betray his Master, and, finally, to hang himself in despair.

2. But how are the stars fallen from heaven? How have become eclipsed those brilliant suns that enlightened the Church by their doctrine and example? How have fallen those great doctors, those illustrious personages, whose loss the Church so much deplores? What was it that led them to the depths of blindness and impenitence, if not slight infidelities, a little obstinacy, a too great opinion of themselves, pride, presumption? From this they went on to resist the authority of the Church, to make open war on God, to abandon religion, and gave themselves up to the most shameful excesses. Ah, if we could go down to hell and inquire of the damned as to the cause of their

damnation, the greater number would tell us, shrieking and making their prisons resound with their sighs and lamentations, that they had been formerly in the grace of Jesus Christ, that they had seen themselves at the threshold of Heaven, but that afterwards, having allowed themselves to fall into tepidity, it led them into a criminal life, and from that to the sad state in which they are. Can we be surprised, then, if God has such a horror for the habit of venial sin, if He takes so much pains to withdraw us from it, if He warns us perpetually against it —"he that despises small things shall fall by little and little"—"he that is faithful in small things, will be unfaithful in those that are greater";—if, finally, He tells us that He has less disgust for a great sinner, for him that is entirely cold, than for him that is in a state of tepidity?

II

1. But what proofs are more convincing of the evil of venial sin than the severe chastisements with which God visits those who are guilty of it?—and this is the last argument I will adduce to dissuade you from committing

it. There should be need of no other motive to excite us to fervor and to preserve us from even the slightest faults.

Lot's wife, for instance, merely turns round in disobedience to God's command to cast a look at the terrible effects of His anger on the guilty city of Sodom; and in the same instant she is struck dead, and her body is changed into a pillar of salt. Moses, that great prophet and friend of God, who had the happiness of conversing familiarly with the Almighty, falls into a fault which appears to us very light. He strikes the rock twice when he causes the water to issue from it, whilst God commanded him solely to speak to the rock; and for this fault he is condemned to die in the wilderness without ever setting foot on the Promised Land. Mary, his sister, is struck with leprosy, and is shamefully expelled from the camp of Israel for having given expression to some murmuring words. Osa lays his hand upon the ark to prevent it from falling, and for this slight irreverence he falls dead on the spot. The Bethsamites, looking upon the ark with a little too much curiosity, pay very dearly for their fault. For this act of curiosity fifty thousand of them meet with a sudden death.

David indulges a thought of vain glory, and for this sin God takes away seventy thousand of his subjects in three days by a pestilence. Ananias and Saphira lie to St. Peter, and in the instant they fall dead at his feet. All those chastisements appear very rigorous, yet many Fathers of the Church teach that all these sinned only venially.

2. But how great is the punishment reserved in the other life for venial sin! We should know, in order to comprehend it, how great is the activity of the fire that burns the souls in Purgatory. St. Augustine assures us that their pains surpass in intensity all that can be suffered in this world. What then will it be to remain in Purgatory for many years, perhaps for ages? And were it necessary in order to expiate a single venial sin to experience the ardors of this fire for only a single day, or a single hour, to what a lapse of time would extend the expiation of so many venial sins which we commit during the course of our life and for which we may not have done penance?

But, and this is worthy of your serious consideration, if we are so unhappy as to be condemned to hell, our venial sins will be there punished eternally even as our mortal sins.

This is an incontestable truth, though a terrible one, and the reason is very evident. And it is this, that every sin must be punished as long as it exists. Now, as venial sin is truly sin, and as in hell it can never be effaced, it must as a necessary consequence be punished eternally, since it will exist eternally.

O dear Sisters, who after this would have the hardihood to expose himself to so many dangers in this world and so many punishments in the next by giving himself up to a life of tepidity? Who amongst you will not excite herself with all her power to fervor in the service of God?

But, alas, how many are there among you who perhaps live in this state of tepidity, and who have need to advance only one step in order to fall into mortal sin? And are you the persons who were in former times all burning with the love of God and full of fervor in the practice of virtue? Are you the persons who went to confession and Communion so often, and with such devotion, who loved the holy Word, who were so assiduous in spiritual reading, and to whom the world with its maxims was insupportable? Ah, I tremble for you, because the contempt of God's graces has made it

very difficult for you to enter once again on a career of fervor.

3. However, you can do so even still with the help of grace, and to this effect I counsel you to adopt the remedies given by God to the Bishop of Laodicea. Hear, He says to him, what you have to do. "Buy of me gold fire-tried that you may be made rich." "Clothe yourself in white garments to cover your nakedness." "Anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may recover your sight." Admirable words, which show us at once the baneful effects of tepidity, and the remedies for it.

Fervor and the love of God restore to our souls the goods that tepidity had taken from them. The exact fulfillment of our duties re-establishes them in their first beauty. And the meditation on the eternal truths cures them of their blindness.

"Behold, I stand at the gate and knock," continues Jesus Christ, speaking to the same Bishop. The Saviour knocks loudly at the gate of your souls today by His grace, and by the renewed invitation which He gives you to enter once again on a life of fervor. "Be zealous, therefore, and do penance." "The

last hour will come quickly." Oh! how we hurry on to the goal of death!

"If any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door (of his heart), I will come in to him, and I will sup with him and he with Me." His life will be a feast of perennial peace and joy. Jesus will be in truth the Spouse of our soul. "To him that shall overcome, I will give him to sit with Me in My throne." He will be rewarded by being made to sit on a throne of peace in the subjection of all his passions to the dominion of reason and grace in this life, and he will merit to sit on a throne of bliss with Christ for all eternity.

TWELFTH CONFERENCE

DEATH AND JUDGMENT

I

1. When our Lord dictated his famous message to the Bishop of Laodicea, as we read in the Apocalypse, one of the things He reprimanded him most severely for was his spiritual blindness, which prevented him from seeing the true state of his soul. "You say that you are full of spiritual gifts, that you are in want of no one; but you know not that you are poor, and blind, and miserable, and in want of all things."

And having called him to account for his faults, he counselled him to adopt suitable remedies. The special remedy counselled him for his spiritual blindness was eye-salve.

"I counsel thee to anoint thy eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest recover thy sight."

Interpreters of Scripture commenting on this passage say that this eye-salve is medita-

tion on the eternal truths. It is meditation on them that opens our eyes to the nothingness of the things of this world, and to the value of those of eternity. This being so, the eternal truths are always to be treated of by him who would conduct a retreat with profit to those who make it. In fact, meditation on them is required, and when the Holy See grants indulgences to those who make the spiritual exercises, it always presupposes meditation on these salutary subjects. Today we shall treat of the first of these—Death.

This is the evil attendant on sin that we are made most of all familiar with. It is the one that was threatened by God to all mankind as its peculiar penalty; the one that we shall all one day, willingly or unwillingly, have to submit to.

All the other penalties of sin can to some extent be remedied or shunned; but the hand of death no man can stay. The decree has gone forth from Him whose unfailing judgment rules all things: "On the day that thou sinnest by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou and thy posterity after thee to the last man shall surely die the death."

Hence, the Apostle in his Epistle to the

Romans promises us all who are born of a sinful stock, that as surely as recompense is due to the laborer after his day of toil, so surely is there due to us all, and we shall all one day receive, the stroke of death, the penalty, the wages, of our own as well as our first father's sin.

"Wherefore," says the Apostle again, "as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death; so, death passeth upon all men in whom all have sinned."

Death, then, being due to all, it behooves us while still journeying along the road of life to ponder seriously over its solemn truth, that by so doing we may learn to regulate our lives in such a manner as to be able to meet death when it comes with constancy and well-grounded confidence.

This is the advice to us of the wisest men of antiquity, the ancient philosophers, who teach that the true science of life is to learn to die well; and that it is impossible for one to rise to the practice of solid and constant virtue unless he think often how he is to die. Nay, it is the counsel of Truth itself, speaking to us by the Wise Man, and a counsel that has been acted on by the saints of every age: "In all thy

ways remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."

2. What then is death, "the wages of sin," according to the Apostle? What is this "last end," the very consideration of which is, by the testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself, sufficient to restrain us from the commission of sin, and which, according to the wise men of old, is so necessary to every one who desires to lead a regular life and practise solid and constant virtue?

Well, death, dear Sisters, may be considered under many aspects, in each of which a strong motive presents itself to urge us to fly from sin and to practise virtue.

Death is the separation from all things that we hold dear in this world; from friends, from family, from home, from all the comforts and conveniences that attach us to the world.

Death is the dissolution of the man, the separation of the soul from the body which was its constant companion throughout all the vicissitudes of life and fortune.

Death is the entering of the body into the cold, silent grave, there to become the prey of rottenness and worms.

Death is the going forth of the soul before

the judgment seat of God to render an account of its actions during life, and to receive the sentence of reward or punishment, according as these actions were meritorious or culpable.

To die, in fine, is to be fixed for ever in a state of supreme enjoyment with God, or to be cast into a pit of torment, there to suffer for ever an agony of desolation and woe. Such is death in itself, and in its inseparable consequences; so difficult to realize amid the cares and pleasures of life, and the thought of which is so terrifying to human nature, that we shrink, while yet we may, from contemplating it in all its grim reality.

When we enter into a garden in the summer time, and see its beds and borders decked with flowers of every shape and hue; when we perceive them fill the air with a rich perfume, a feeling of sadness sometimes comes over us, as we think that after a while all this beauty will fade; all this richness of tint and beauty of perfume will disappear; and nothing will be left but shrivelled-up leaves, and faded petals, and withered stems—that all that which now delights us will be fit only to be plucked up and cast into the dungpit, there to rot with weeds and ordure. And so it is with life, my Sisters.

As I look around me in this chapel and scan the faces that at this moment are lit up with attention, as they listen to my words, do I not perceive numbers who are in the bloom of health and youth? It saddens me to think that a day will come when every one here: when the youngest and the strongest among us, as well as the old and the feeble, will become shrunk up and withered with the agonies that shall precede the final dissolution—that that body of which you were once perhaps so vain, and which you tried to set off with a thousand little arrangements of dress, will become a thing to be cast into the grave there to moulder into dust.

3. I have said that death separates us from all things we hold dear in the world. You are at present vain perhaps out of certain advantages of birth or fortune. You pride yourself on the possession of gifts or accomplishments that distinguish you among your fellows. Ah, what will all these avail you in the end? Go to the churchyard yonder and sit in meditation on the silent tomb, and test the truth of the saying of the Wise Man: "I have seen all things under the sun; and behold, vanity of vanities, and all is vanity."

You are now perhaps charmed with the

world—its pleasures, its amusements, with even that little of the world that penetrates within your convent walls. It appears to you a fairy land where all is designed for enjoyment. Perhaps you are not content with its lawful delights. Perhaps like your mother Eve you pluck the apple of forbidden pleasure and transgress the Commandments of God. Ah, remember death! Its stern hand is nigh. It may fall upon you in more dreadful form than it did upon Eve when she saw the dead body of her cherished son the prey of the vultures of the desert. You are attached to your convent home, to your sisters, to your children, to your offices and position in the order. You live for them. You expose your health, your life to sustain them. Perhaps you are not afraid to offend God for their sakes. Ah, remember your last end! A day shall come when you shall have to quit that home which you were so fond of, and enter into the cold, narrow grave, there to moulder into dust, unthought of, uncared for by the world; aye, even by those very friends for whose sake you now do not fear to offend God. Strangers will inhabit your beloved home, and things will go

on "as merry as a marriage bell" without you. An hour will come when those friends of yours will press for the last time your hand in death; and then, a long and last farewell, to meet again only in the realms beyond the grave.

You are at present carried away headlong on the turbulent stream of your passions. You move not hand or foot to fight against the current. You are borne along gaily on the muddy torrent and think it all so pleasant. Ah, remember! These waters pour down towards the cataracts of destruction! Perhaps you are already nearing the point beyond which it will be impossible for you to escape; and after that, nothing awaits you but inevitable ruin. Then shall you cry out for help, and help will not be given you. "You shall call upon Me in that day," says the Lord, "and I will not hear you." "You have despised My counsel. You have neglected My reprehensions. I also will laugh at your destruction and will mock you when that shall come upon you which you feared. When sudden calamity shall fall upon you, and destruction as a tempest shall be at hand; when tribulation and distress shall come upon you; then shall you

call upon Me and I will not hear you; you shall rise in the morning and you will not find Me."

Such is death, dearly beloved, if we consider it with regard to those things we shall have to part with at that great and the supreme hour.

II

1. But far more worthy of our deep and earnest consideration are those things that shall succeed that final separation, and the life which the soul will enter on when it has passed from the prison-house of the body.

This it is that the Wise Man primarily speaks of when He says that he who remembers it shall never sin. The thought of those things that follow death it was, that restrained the fire of passion in men's hearts in every age; that caused them to avoid sin and its occasions, and taught them to lead virtuous lives. It was this thought that caused even the very saints to fear.

And, in fact, what can be more worthy life-long meditation than the great, the supreme issues that are at stake—supreme as regards the soul's destination, the moment of its de-

parture from the body? They are decisive. They are irreparable. They are eternal.

At death the reign of mercy which we were accustomed to from childhood ceases; that of Divine Justice, strict, searching, impartial Justice, begins. In a moment, with the rapidity of thought, the soul finds itself before the judgment seat of God, alone, to answer for a life-time, to give an account of its every thought, and word, and deed, and omission.

Oh, how shall the soul of the careless religious be astonished when it shall find every act and thought of life recorded in the book of Divine Justice, and "every idle word that man shall speak," he shall have to render an account of it before the Sovereign Judge. Quicker than thought its doom is sealed, of eternal happiness with God; or of eternal woe in hell. No excuse received; no fault palliated; no plea valid; no resolution available; no promise accepted. "On whatever side the tree leans, there shall it fall." In whatever state man falls into the hands of the living God; so, shall he receive sentence for eternity.

The consequences are irreparable. Man dies but once, and if once he is lost, he is lost for ever. If he fall into the hands of God in the

state of mortal sin, he is damned for all eternity.

2. What heightens the tragic character of death is that though "it is appointed unto men once to die"; though death works such changes in the physical man; though such fearful issues depend upon it; yet, it is uncertain both as to the time in which it will take place, and as to the state in which it will find us. These things are hidden in the counsels of God. Yes, "at the very hour you think not the Son of Man will come." It is for this reason that Our Lord compared death to a thief, who, as you know, in order to compass his designs, chooses the time of night when men are buried in sleep, and are least prepared to offer him effectual resistance. It takes away the libertine in the midst of his pleasures. It surprises the ambitious man at the very time that he is most taken up with the prosecution of his designs. It cuts short the career of enjoyment of the young man or woman; whilst even to the aged it comes on with surprise.

Is it not this that we see every day? Is it not this that may happen to you yourselves who listen to me? You count upon time which perhaps will not be yours. A certain year will

come for you, and in that year a month, and in that month a day, and in that day an hour when you shall die; but when will that time be? "Amen, I say to you," says Jesus Christ. "You know not the day nor the hour."

3. It were small matter indeed that we are uncertain as to the time of death, if we were at least assured that it would find us in the state of grace; but here again, we are confronted with the most mysterious uncertainty. In what state shall we be at death? We know not, dear Sisters, and it was this fearful uncertainty that made the saints tremble even after years of heroic penance and self-sacrifice. We know not. All we can say is that to die in the state of grace is the gift of final perseverance —a special grace which we should daily beg of God, say the saints, but which we can never merit in strict justice; nor promise ourselves with certainty; because no one knows whether he is, or will be then "worthy of love or hatred" —a grace which Saint Hilarian, the patriarch of the monks of Syria, after eighty years of heroic penance, still feared lest he might be deprived of; because it depends on the pure mercy of God.

4. Remember your last end, then, dear Sis-

ters, but let not your remembrance stop at a barren thought. Let the conception of the terrible consequences of a bad death urge you on in the way of penance and virtue.

Take well to heart the moral contained in the parable of the ten virgins. "Let your lamps be trimmed, and replenished with oil, and burning brightly, and let yourselves go forth to meet the Bridegroom; so that when He cometh, you may enter with Him into the wedding."

Yes, let your lamps be trimmed by the practice of a regular life, and by carrying within you consciences undefiled. Let them be replenished with the oil of charity, which alone is of value before God. Let them be burning brightly with works of holy zeal, which shall so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, who is in Heaven.

And when the midnight cry is raised; "Behold the Bridegroom cometh," be ready, and go forth to meet Him, by a joyous submission to the Divine will in the circumstances of your last illness. Then indeed will you be invited to enter with Him to the marriage feast of eternal life. Nay, you will be among that privileged band of virgins whom St. John saw

standing on a high mountain in the midst of the heavenly Jerusalem, surrounding the Lamb and, with palm branches in their hands, singing the new canticle first taught to the world by Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother, and to be chanted by them throughout the ages of eternity.

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE

THE GENERAL JUDGMENT: PRELIMINARIES

"I believe that Jesus Christ shall come to judge the living and the dead." (*Apostles' Creed.*)

I

1. Among the great truths that form the fundamental articles of Christian belief, there is none on which greater stress is laid, or which is asserted more frequently in Holy Scripture, than this of the last or general judgment of mankind. It is a truth proclaimed again and again in the pages of the Old as well as of the New Testament.

The prophets were accustomed to put it, often under various figures, often in plain language, before the minds of the Jewish people. Our Lord speaks of it more than once in the Gospel. The sacred writers of the New Testament call up frequently the terrors of

that great "day of the Lord." Nay, and the fathers, doctors, and preachers of the Church have at all times spoken and written of the great doctrine of the General Judgment and have not wearied in sounding it in the ears of the faithful. What is the reason, dearly beloved, that one perceives at all times in the Church of God this spirit that impels her to think and speak often of this dread truth? It is none other than that we may have always before us the salutary warning of the Wise Man: "In all thy ways remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." Frequent meditation on the terrors of the General Judgment, the end of man, has that in it whereby we are drawn from the commission of sin and impelled to the practice of virtue. It was the thought of the account that must be rendered before the judgment seat of God that made so many holy souls leave the world and spend their lives in penance and prayer. It was the same thought that gave the martyrs courage to submit to the false judgments of their persecutors and to yield up their lives joyfully in the midst of torments. It was this all-absorbing thought that made St. Jerome, even after he had tamed by his virtue the

fierce beasts of the forest, still practise those incredible austerities which have made him the type of a penitential life. For, naked in His cave of Bethlehem and striking His bared breast with a stone, he tells us that he used to start in terror from his sleep as he fancied he heard the great archangel proclaim in tones of thunder: "Arise, ye dead and come to judgment!" Thoughts like these took possession of the disciples when, as the Gospel tells us, they sat at our Lord's feet and questioned Him, saying: "Master, when shall these things be, and when shall they begin to come to pass?" We gather from the different evangelists that our Lord sat on the Mount of Olives with His disciples, and that His face was towards the temple of Jerusalem. Oh, chosen spot on which to meditate on this awful and salutary truth! Before Him lay the city of Jerusalem with its high walls and strong towers, and its double line of fortifications; with its splendid domes and palaces, the pride of every Israelite; but which, before forty years, by the inexorable judgment of God, should be leveled to the dust, so that to this day the exact site of the ancient city can scarcely be found. We are told

that He looked towards the temple—that superb edifice, beauteous in all the glory of its recent restoration, which had that very day called forth the admiration of the disciples, but of which our Lord in reply, foretold: "Amen, I say to you, there shall not be left of it a stone upon a stone." Beyond the city, a little to the right, stood the hill of Calvary, upon which He Himself, the Man-God, was within three days to die as a bleeding Victim for sin. A few miles to the rear, the bitter waters of the Dead Sea rolled over the "Cities of the Plain" a perpetual memorial of God's anger and fierce judgment upon sinners. Under the walls of Jerusalem lay the Valley of Hennom, the "valley of slaughter," as it was called, whose very name to the Jews was that used to signify the infernal pit in which sinners shall everlastingly burn; while out before Him stretched the ample plain of Josaphat, the very spot in the mind of the Jews, in which the General Judgment of all mankind was to take place and the tremendous sentence of eternal bliss or eternal woe pronounced.

2. Let us also, dear Sisters, ascend the Mount of Olives. Let us gaze in spirit on the prospect around us and beneath us as we medi-

tate with the disciples on the words of Jesus Christ while He expounded to them the mysteries of that great day.

"There shall be signs," He says, "in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars." It is in those heavenly bodies, therefore, that the first warning shall be given of the cataclysm that is to follow. St. John tells us that "the sun on that day will become black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon as blood, and the stars from heaven fall upon the earth, as the fig tree casteth its green figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind." "Darkness shall cover the earth as with a garment," more horrible than that which of old covered the land of Egypt, when "no man saw his neighbor, or moved out of the place in which he was." "And on the earth distress of nations by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves."

We are told that the earth will be consumed by fire. Streams of flame shall shoot out over the whole earth roaring and destroying as the ocean when it lashes its waves in fury against the rocks and hurls the stoutest ship like a toy beneath its waters. The mountains shall fume and tremble as did Sinai on the day that God

descended upon it to proclaim the law to the Jews; while overhead shall lightnings flash, with claps of thunder more terrific than those which paralyzed with fear the assembled Jews, when they besought Moses that the "Lord would no longer speak to them lest they die." "And on the earth distress of nations by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves!" Terrified at those portential signs the Scripture says that "men shall wither away in fear and expectation of what shall come to pass upon the whole world."

The prophet Sophonias thus describes the terrors of that great day: "The great day of the Lord is near; it is near, and exceeding swift. The voice of the day of the Lord is bitter. The mighty shall there meet with tribulation. That day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and obscurity, a day of clouds and whirlwinds, a day of trumpet and alarm." "And the kings of the earth," says another prophet, "and the princes, and the tribunes, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman, and every freeman, shall hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and they shall say, fall upon us

and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for, the great day of wrath is come and who shall be able to stand?" . . .

3. But hark! What sound is that which rises above the din and crash of the crumbling world? O God! It is the voice of the great archangel who blows his trumpet "on the shore of the sea which is the earth," and calls with a voice of thunder; "Arise! ye dead, and come to Judgment!" St. John in the Apocalypse tells us some of the circumstances that shall accompany that dread summons. "And I saw," says he, "a mighty angel coming down from heaven clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was on his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet like pillars of brass; and he cried with a loud voice as when a lion roareth; and he lifted his hand to heaven, and he swore by Him that liveth forever and ever, who created the heavens and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are therein, that time shall be no more."

Oh, sublime and awful moment! Time shall be no more. Yes, time shall be no more! The time of pleasure shall be no more; the time

of offending God with impunity shall be no more! Oh, mercy! the time of mercy shall be no more! . . .

II

1. Who are those myriads of dark forms that reluctantly soar over the mouth of yonder smoking abyss? Who are those horrid shrieking beings that fly about in wild confusion? Oh, horror! They are the damned spirits, men and devils, aroused by that trumpet note which rang from end to end of hell summoning the reprobate: "Time shall be no more! Arise, ye damned, and come to judgment!"

Oh, who can think of that dread sumomns and sin? Ask the damned who are now about to appear before the Eternal Judge, were they allowed to come to earth again and live, would they dare to offend their Lord and God? Ask that drunkard, would he again extinguish in himself the light of reason by self-indulgence? Ask that angry soul that appears to have been devouring himself in hell, were he allowed to live on earth, would he again quarrel with his neighbor, whom God commanded him to love, even as himself? Ask that unjust dealer who

when on earth pilfered the goods of his neighbor, would he again, were the opportunity given him, act unjustly? Ask that impure wretch who when on earth wallowed in the mire, whose every thought was sin, whose every desire was foulness unutterable, whose very words scattered abroad stench as the dunghill, whose every act was unclean as ill became a beast; were he allowed time of repentance, would he walk in the paths of iniquity, now that he realizes that he is about to appear before a Judge with whom even idle words shall receive their meed of justice, and before whom the very just shall scarcely feel secure?

Oh, dreadful thought of judgment! "Mighty men," that is, the proud, "shall there meet with tribulation." "Men shall wither away in fear and expectation of what shall come to pass upon the whole world." "And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the tribunes, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman, and every freeman, shall hide themselves in the dens and the rocks of the mountains, and they shall say to the rocks and the mountains: 'fall upon us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great

day of wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" '

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, Saviour of the world, be pleased to have mercy on us, and grant us a favorable judgment on that Great Day? Save us for Thy Mercy's sake! We acknowledge that we have offended Thee grievously and in numbers beyond the hairs of our head. We grieve over these sins with our whole heart because by them we have deserved eternal chastisements; because by them we deserve an unfavorable judgment at Thy hand, but most of all because we have offended Thee who art so good and worthy of our love and we will not sin again. "Here burn, O Lord! Here cut; here spare not: but spare us for eternity!"

FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE

THE GENERAL JUDGMENT: THE DECREE

I

We have considered, dearly beloved Sisters, the signs that shall precede "the great day of the Lord." We have reflected on the moving scenes that shall then take place, and on the terror that shall take possession of the wicked.

1. But thanks be to God, it will not be altogether a day of wrath and condemnation! No, for Jesus Christ has said: "When these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is at hand." Why is it, dear Sisters, that those words of consolation are introduced into this discourse, which up to this has sounded but of terror and alarm? It is to intimate that, as this day will be one of wrath for the unjust, so it will be one of consolation and reward for the elect. In the beginning of the discourse Christ told His

disciples that they would have to suffer many things in this world for His Name's sake; that they would be delivered up to the synagogues, and cast into prisons; that they would be delivered before temporal judges; that even their own relatives would betray them, and that they would be objects of hatred to the lovers of the world, because of their adherence to virtue and religion. And now He comforts them by the assurance of future reward.

Oh, what shall be the consolation of the just when Christ Himself will reward them for their suffering in His service! In this world indeed the just meet with many tribulations. But the judgment seat of God will be for them only a tribunal of acquittal and reward.

Then will the rags of poverty worn with resignation and humility, shine more gloriously than the bejeweled vesture of kings. Then will the rebuffs of a frowning world borne with Christian fortitude, bring joy beyond that tasted by those who lived in ease and indulgence. The sorrows of the afflicted will be turned into joy, and the patience of the servants of Christ will be rewarded with a crown of incorruptible glory. In this world sinners are everywhere mingled with the just; but

then, "God shall send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather the elect from the four winds and from the furthermost parts of the heavens, to the uttermost bounds of them." "And the just shall be caught up into the clouds to meet Christ." "Look up O ye meek and humble." "Lift up your heads," "O ye sorrowful and persecuted"; "for, your redemption is at hand." "And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty." "Heaven and earth shall flee before Him," as He appears in the majesty of the Man-God "coming to judge the living and the dead." "And I saw," says St. John in his vision of the General Judgment, "a great white throne, and one sitting upon it, from whose face earth and heaven fled away, and there was no place for them." "And I saw the dead great and small standing in the presence of the throne."

2. "And the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by the things that were written in the book according to their works." O Christian soul, consider what it is to stand before the face of a God all-seeing,

just, and terrible! "And I saw the dead great and small standing in the presence of the throne."

"And the books were opened." Yes, for now there is more than one accountant. The devil will be there with his book of the life and actions of every man, from Adam down to the last child that will have been born—of the faults committed—of the sins of the eyes, and of the ears, and of the tongue, and of the taste, and of the touch; yes, and of the unuttered thoughts of man's crooked heart. The book of the all-seeing God will be opened, which will give testimony to every idle word that man shall have spoken. Aye, and a third book shall be opened and one perhaps more astonishingly severe than either of the other two; and that will be the book of man's own conscience. That interior tribunal that God gave to every man will then issue its record of the acts of men's life. Sins that were forgotten for years shall be presented before the soul in the sight of men and angels with a clearness that will astonish it—sins committed in secret,—sins that we were ashamed to speak of before men, —sins concealed from the confessor in the sacred tribunal of penance,—sins which the very

conscience itself shrank from looking at,—are now presented to its reluctant gaze, are now exhibited to the whole world.

3. And then, dear Sisters, the sentence! You all know it. Those few words from St. Matthew cannot but appear awesome to the mind of even the most thoughtless child, as he recites them from his Catechism. "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" Oh, what shall be the despair of the damned when they shall hear that awful sentence from Jesus Christ, their Judge? What shall be the anguish that will wring their terror-stricken souls at the pronouncement of their awful doom? "Depart from Me," from *Me* who would have pressed you to My bosom as My dearest children—from *Me* who have shed the last drop of My Heart's blood to redeem you from the power of Satan. Begone for ever from *Me,* who have created you for the enjoyment of My presence for all eternity. "Ye cursed," cursed by your companions in guilt as the cause of their greater torture! Cursed by My angels and saints as the offenders of the Divine Majesty:—cursed by your own selves as the cause of your own ruin, and as the reprobates who dared to raise your rebellious

heads against the Most High; cursed by Me, your Lord, your God, your Creator, your merciful Redeemer, and now your implacable Judge! Get ye gone into everlasting fire kindled by the breath of My anger, not for you, but for Satan and his rebellious angels! "*There* shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

4. Far different will be the sentence which the Eternal Judge will pronounce upon the elect. To the reprobate, indeed, He will exhibit Himself as an inexorable Judge, at the breath of whose anger "heaven and earth shall flee away in fear." But to the just He will show Himself the tenderest of Fathers, inviting His children to the everlasting banquet of His love.

"Come ye blessed of My Father," of My Eternal Father, who has adopted you as His children by the adoption wherewith I adopted you when I deigned to assume your nature. "Possess the kingdom which was prepared for you," that blessed country where "you will be inebriated with the plenty of God's house and drink of the torrent of His pleasures." Come from the dwelling place of guilt, and tears, and sorrow, to the abode of rest and peace.

Come to share in the kingdom of your Heavenly Father, and to reign with Him forever. "Ye blessed of My Father," who "has loved you with an everlasting love." You in whom He sees children redeemed by My blood and coheirs with Me in the kingdom of His glory. Ye meek and humble, "look up." Ye sorrowful and afflicted, "lift up your heads," for, the full blossoming of "your redemption is at hand." My own beloved ones that have suffered with Me, enter into the land "where I shall wipe away all tears from your eyes," and "death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more; for the former things have passed away."

5. This, dear Sisters, is the substance of the words of the Gospel. There is no word of addition to it from beginning to end. Every sentence that is spoken in this passage of Scripture is confirmed, and strengthened, and put in more striking form, in other parts of the divine writings. Is it not awful from beginning to end? And was it not with reason that St. Jerome used to start from his sleep at the thought of Judgment? Should not we also put on the fear of God? And if he, a saint worn to death with austerity,

so feared for himself, at the thought of Judgment, shall not we, sinners, tremble? Oh, "it is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" "My brethren," says St. Augustine, "I would exhort you to banish all fear, if I myself felt secure; but I tremble at the thought of hell."

What, then, shall we do to escape from that awful doom? Let us, my dear Sisters, take the precautions counselled by our blessed Lord in this very discourse. "Take heed that no man seduce you." "He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved." "Be ye always ready; for at what hour you know not, the Son of Man will come." "Blessed is that servant whom when his Master cometh He shall find watching." "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for, you know not when the time is."

FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE

HELL

"Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." (*Matt. XXV, 46.*)

I

1. We have considered the evil of mortal sin in its nature and as it affects God. We have considered it in its results, and as it regards man; namely, in the loss of God's grace and friendship, and in the various penalties it has brought upon him in this life.

We now go on to the consideration of it in its ultimate and most awe-inspiring result; namely, in the eternal punishment of the damned in hell.

With regard to that punishment, let me premise that just as the nature of the penalty a culprit is about to undergo for a state offence is known from the words of his sentence; so, also, the punishment inflicted on the damned

is foreshadowed in the sentence pronounced upon them by the Eternal Judge.

That punishment is of a threefold nature, corresponding to the three members of that dread sentence: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

"Depart from Me, ye cursed"; behold the first punishment of the damned: the privation of all good.

"Into fire"; behold the second punishment: the accumulation of all evil.

"Eternal"; behold the third punishment: torment everlasting.

First, then, the damned are deprived of all good. Now, there are three sorts of good which we are capable of possessing: temporal goods, spiritual goods, and the Eternal Good; and of all those will the damned be deprived in hell.

Of all the temporal goods, which a man enjoys in this world, not one will accompany him to the next. "The rich man," says the book of Job, "when he shall sleep, shall take nothing with him; he shall open his eyes and shall find nothing."

"A certain man was rich," says our Lord, "who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and

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he fed sumptuously every day." The rich man died and was buried in hell. The wicked rich man had abused his riches. He is now so poor that there remains nothing to him but the remembrance of his riches, of his pleasures, of his past glory. "Son," says Abraham to him, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life time; and of those things that thou desirest I cannot send thee any; for, there is a great chaos between us." This is the reply that he shall hear for all eternity—"I cannot send thee any"; no, not even a drop of water, which is ready in abundance for the poorest of the poor; "not even a drop of water to cool thy burning tongue."

Behold the state of indigence to which each damned soul will be reduced from the moment of its condemnation. All earthly goods—dignities, honors, pleasures, friends, amusements—it will be deprived of all. By all those it used to offend God, and now it will justly be deprived of all. Nay, all these things that it used on earth as instruments to offend God will now serve God as instruments to punish it.

2. In the second place, the damned are deprived of all spiritual goods. No more grace for the poor lost souls! No more sacraments!

The time of merit and penance is past. They shall never obtain mercy in hell. No longer do those sweet whisperings of the Holy Spirit, inviting to penance and amendment, fall lovingly on the sinner's ears! Those heavenly helps that of old used come to the soul, soft as the morning's dew, by whose gentle pressure the tide of tears came welling forth, are now withdrawn! No more shall the soul be cleansed by the outpouring of the Blood of Christ in the holy tribunal of penance! No more shall a banquet of delights be prepared for her in the Holy Communion! The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Immaculate Victim for sin! O soul condemned for sin, does not even the Holy Mass release, or at least relieve the agonies of thy state? "Alas," the lost replies, "there is no Redemption in hell."

"Mine eye," says God by the prophet Ezechiel, "Mine eye shall not spare thee; neither will I have pity on thee; but I will lay thy ways upon thee; and thy abominations shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord that smite thee."

3. Lastly, the damned shall be deprived of the Eternal Good; and here it is that in very truth, the privation of the reprobate begins.

"Depart from Me, ye cursed." This is the greatest and most terrible of the torments of hell; that which spiritual writers style the "pain or loss." It is that torment by which the soul is deprived for ever of that for which it was created.

All things naturally tend to the end for which they were created; and when they are thwarted in the attainment of that end there is a preternatural straining after it which, in physical nature, is the cause of monsters. "Our hearts were made for Thee, O Lord," says Saint Augustine, "and they can never rest until they rest in Thee." Yes, our souls have an ardent craving for the possession of God, and nothing less than God can satisfy that craving. They were created with a capacity for the possession of the infinite, and nothing less than the enjoyment of the Infinite Good can satisfy their aspirations.

Give a man all the enjoyment that earth can offer. Let him participate in every amusement. Let him taste of every pleasure. Give him the indulgence of every passion. In the end, his heart is empty. He hungers for something more.

No man ever indulged himself more in this

respect than did Solomon in the days of his fall. No man that ever lived had greater facilities for doing so than he. And at the end, in the emptiness of his heart he was forced to exclaim: "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity!" How is this? Why cannot the heart of man be satisfied with the enjoyment of merely natural goods? "Because, Thou hast created us for Thyself, O Lord, and we can never rest until we rest in Thee."

While we are in this world and united to the body to which earthly things are congenial, we are not so sensible of this bent of our aspirations. But after death, when the soul is divested of the body, then does it feel with all the force of which an immaterial spirit is capable this straining after the possession of the Infinite. Oh, the anguish unspeakable of the damned, who feel at every moment an ineffable longing to be united with God, who are drawn with all the force of their nature to the possession of the Eternal Good, and who at every moment find themselves repulsed by that same God to whom all their aspirations tend! "Depart from Me, ye cursed," you are no longer My children. I know you not. You have chosen sin for your portion. You have put

on wickedness as a garment. You shall be repudiated by Me for all eternity!

Oh, terrible thought! to be deprived of all Good; but salutary thought for us who have it still in our power to profit by the sad example of the damned!

II

1. In hell the damned will be loaded with every kind of evil. Now, I do not wish to give any description of hell which Holy Scripture has not given us sanction for. But Holy Scripture lets us know that in hell the damned will be afflicted with sensible torment—the torment of fire. "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into fire." "Into fire?" By this we learn that the principal sensible torment of hell is fire. Now of all the descriptions that could be given of hell none is capable of making a more lively impression on us than to be told that the damned will be tormented by fire. In this world there is no torment to which the human frame can be subjected that equals that of fire. The sword may cut and hack. The body may be bruised, and pounded, or torn to pieces by wild beasts. These torments are yet in some

way supportable. But let but the tip of the finger be subjected for a few moments to the mildest form of fire—the flame of a candle, and an intolerable pain results.

Who then can conceive the torment of the damned when, not the flame of a candle, not the fiercest earthly furnace, but the fire kindled by the wrath of an angry God shall torture them for ever?

2. This fire has, moreover, qualities which earthly fires have not, and which were specially given it for the punishment of the wicked. Earthly fires, indeed, affect material substances; but they have no power to hurt immaterial spirits. But the fire of hell, whatever its nature, has, by the design of God, for the torture of the wicked, the power of acting immediately on the souls of the reprobate. Yes, not only the body which naturally is subject to the influence of fire, but even the immaterial soul shall be tormented in these miserable flames.

Another quality of the fire of hell is that it burns without consuming or being itself consumed.

Earthly fires burn and consume their victims, and after a while they are themselves con-

sumed; but the fire of hell is always active, and ever renewed. Each moment it receives renewed energy to torture its victims. It moreover tortures without consuming. It does to the damned what salt does to earthly substances; it preserves them while it penetrates every part of them. And hence Scripture in describing the state of the wicked in hell, says: "They shall be salted with fire."

Yes, for, as salt, in order to preserve the substances on which it acts, must permeate them; so, the fire of hell shall permeate and impregnate with its tormenting energy every particle of the bodies, as it will also affect the souls of the damned. The tongue shall burn within the mouth. The brain within the skull shall seethe. The heart within the breast shall beat, instinct with living fire.

3. But fire affects only the sense of touch, and fire is not the only evil with which the wicked shall be afflicted. No, every sense, every faculty of body and soul shall have its proper torment.

The eyes shall be tormented with the lurid darkness of those caverns of despair which the fire will not illuminate. The horrid forms of those monsters of iniquity who formerly had

been the curse of earth shall torture the wretched sense of sight. The ears shall be tormented with the horrible curses and imprecations, with the harrowing noises and with the spiteful yells of their tormentors. The taste and smell shall be tormented with the fetid taste and loathsome stench of the brimstone and the corruption of their putrefying carcases. The memory shall be laden with the sad recollection of their past sins. The mind shall reflect on the lost beauty of God whom it must now never, never see. The will shall be continually attracted to the eternal Good, and shall for ever find itself rejected. Ever shall the words of its condemnation sound like thunder to the soul: "Depart from Me, ye cursed."

Oh, ineffable misery of the damned! Who can contemplate these things and dare to commit sin? Reflect on them seriously, and often, dear Sisters. You will find in them a powerful motive urging you to the avoidance of sin, and to the practice of the virtues of your state.

SIXTEENTH CONFERENCE

ETERNITY OF HELL

"Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." (*Matt. XXV, 46.*)

1. In our last meditation we considered hell as the privation of all good and the accumulation of all evil.

But the privation of God, the Eternal Good, and the accumulation of all evil in the torment of all the faculties of soul and body are not all the evils that the reprobate shall undergo in hell. No, for holy David, in the tenth psalm says: "Fire and brimstone and storms of winds shall form only a part of the cup of their misery." No, for hell is the "treasure-house of the anger of God," as St. Paul says; and in a treasure-house of anger, you know, there are many kinds of instruments of torture. And those, God tells us in another part of Scripture, He will not spare upon His enemies: "I have trampled upon them in My in-

dignation and have trodden them down in My wrath: for the day of vengeance is in My heart." All those tortures would be perhaps in some way tolerable were some hope held out to the poor reprobates that their sufferings would one day have an end. Is there any such hope held out to them, were it to be fulfilled even after millions of ages of torture? "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into fire everlasting." O word, short and simple in its form, but great in its signification! Momentous word that completes the despair of the damned! Have you any conception, dearly beloved, of the dreadful import of this word, eternity, as it regards the poor reprobate in hell? Saint John, in the Apocalypse, describes the angel as crying out with a loud voice and denouncing the chastisement of those who on earth shall have opposed the Lamb—that is, Jesus Christ—in those words: "They shall drink of the wine of God's wrath, and they shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, and the smoke of their torments shall go up for ever and ever; neither shall they have rest either by day or by night."

Yes, dear Sisters, the smoke of the torments of the damned shall go up for ever and ever. Years shall roll on, ages shall glide away, king-

doms shall rise and fall; but to the damned there is no change. The same curses and blasphemy, the same detestable companions, remorse perpetual corroding their vitals, agony unceasing maddening its victims, hatred relentless against everything holy and venerable, insurrection indomitable against nature and against God! When the sun in the heavens shall have lost its splendor; when the heavens themselves shall have passed away; when the earth, with its span of time embracing myriads of years shall appear but as a speck on the horizon of the memory, eternity shall have but begun its course. And throughout all those ages nothing but shame and woe; nothing but remorse and despair; nothing but burnings and agony. "What is eternity as regards the damned?" asks a great French writer. "It is a pendulum, every beat of which repeats in the silence of the tomb those words: "ever, always, never."

2. Dreadful thought, eternal damnation! Agonizing reflection to the reprobate in the midst of their torments! There is a God all glorious for whom I was created; and His face I shall never, never see. There is a heaven

in which my throne was set; and its glory I shall never enjoy. There is a happiness for which I was ordained; and its sweets I shall never taste. Never, never! always, always! Never mercy, never light, never hope, never pardon! Always in tears; always in sorrow; always in suffering; always in despair! My body pained; my soul tortured; my brain racked; and all this never to have an end! O eternity, eternity!

At this thought the poor reprobate, abandoned by God, disappointed in every hope, without remedy, without resource, gives himself up to the horrors of despair; and in his rage he tries to destroy himself and tear himself to pieces. And since he cannot, he breaks out into incontrollable rage and fury. He opens his mouth in blasphemy against the Most High, and from his burning throat flings curses on all things sacred and profane. Cursed be the fate that has doomed me to those flames, and the sins that were the cause of my damnation! Why was I created? Cursed be the day I was born! Why did my mother bear me, and why did that day see the light on which I came into the world? Cursed be the companions that

led me into sin! Why did not the world perish before I offended the Almighty? Must I then be tormented for ever in those flames? Revengeful God, do Thy worst! Burn me yet more and more! I care not for Thee! Heap, if Thou wilt, still greater torments on my head! Ah, woe is me! Burning for endless ages! Never to be released! Never to see the face of God! Melancholy everlasting! Never-ending anguish and despair!

3. These things are terrible to hear, dear Sisters. How terrible to experience them in hell. To suffer for all eternity! To suffer every moment of eternity! To suffer each moment the torture of an eternity! With reason indeed does the great doctor St. Thomas of Aquin say that he cannot conceive how it can be that Christians believe in the existence of hell and yet offend God by mortal sin. How the saints feared the punishment of hell! "I tremble all over," says St. Bernard, "at the thought of that region, and all my bones are troubled." And St. Augustine, at the thought of hell, begs God to torture him with any punishment in this world provided that He saved him from the torture of hell hereafter. "Here burn," says he, "here cut; here

spare not; provided Thou spare me for eternity."

Are we affected at the thought of hell? If not, our case is only a little less pitiable than that of the unhappy damned. "He who is not stricken with fear at the noise of such a thunder," says St. Augustine, "does not slumber; he is not asleep; he is already dead."

4. Can such a fate as to form one of the unhappy company of the damned be awaiting any of us? Ah! away with the dreadful thought that would sadden the remainder of our lives! But, my Sisters, a great thinker of our age, and a holy man, has said that you can scarcely cast your eyes down the crowded street that they will not fall on many men and women who will be one day amongst the damned. St. Teresa saw in vision the souls of men fall like snow-flakes into the mouth of hell. Pay special attention to what I am going to say. There were tens of thousands who this time yesterday were as full of life and worldly hopes as we are, and who enjoyed the good things of the world as we do, and who have already commenced their eternity of punishment in hell.

Shall I, oh can I, put the question? Do I see at this moment in this temple of the living

God, among those who worship before the throne of Jesus Christ, one, anyone, many, who are destined to suffer hereafter in hell? I do not know, dear Sisters, nor yet can I give you any assurance that it will not be so. I can only answer in the words of St. Augustine: "I am terrified with fear. I would bid you banish all fear if I myself felt secure; but I tremble at the thought of hell."

Yes, we may join in religious worship with the saints of God; but that will not make us secure. Judas spent three years in the company of Jesus Christ. He saw His many miracles. He received the special attentions of the Master. He afterwards betrayed Him into the hands of His enemies, and that very night he got a rope and hanged himself in despair and was damned!

All I can do is to point out to you the secure way to avoid hell, as it is shown us by our Divine Lord Himself. "With fear and trembling work out your salvation." "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." "Enter ye in by the narrow gate" of the observance of God's commandments. "For wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to

destruction, and many there are that go in thereat. But how narrow is the gate and straight the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it."

SEVENTEENTH CONFERENCE

ETERNITY OF HELL

"And the rich man died, and he was buried in hell." (*Luke XVI, 22.*)

I

1. In this parable of the rich glutton our Blessed Lord, by one of those bold and rapid sketches so frequently to be met with in Holy Scripture, puts before us at a glance the alternative fate that awaits us all in the next world; either an eternity of happiness with God, symbolized in the happy state of Lazarus lying in Abraham's bosom, or an eternity of woe, typified in the sad lot of the rich glutton buried in hell. At the same time He lays before us the conditions that make for the attainment of the one or the other of those states hereafter:—of the former, suffering, poverty, hunger, contempt, relieved a little perhaps at times by the crumbs of comfort that come even indirectly from the wicked; and the sympathy

of God's lowly creatures symbolized by the dog that licked the poor beggar's sores, as he lay at the rich man's gate: of the latter, a lavish abundance of the good things of this world; finery in the way of clothing and dwelling; luxury in eating and drinking; honors, riches, pleasures, "heaped up and running over"; and indulged in without regard to order or measure; and hereafter, sepulture in hell.

But it is not to the salient points of this fine parable that I desire to direct your attention today; nor yet the many practical deductions that may be drawn from it; nor the moral lessons that it contains. My purpose is to lay before you a truth which I know beforehand you are all convinced of, but which has been persistently denied, with great injury to souls; namely, the eternity of the pains of hell. It is a truth which many dare not even call to their remembrance; and which no one has yet been able to contemplate without feeling a cold shiver of horror pass through him; but which, nevertheless, all the damned are obliged to bear the weight of, after they have renderd an account to the Sovereign Judge.

2. In the punishments of the damned which faith proposes to us, there are some that strike

our senses, and enter into our imagination. We can form to ourselves some idea of the fire, of the hunger, of the thirst, and of many other punishments; but in regard to eternity, we see absolutely nothing. It is the "darkness," spoken of in the sacred text, "which covers the face of the abyss," and which the light of the Almighty alone can penetrate. It is the "chaos" which the Patriarch Abraham calls "inaccessible," when speaking to the rich glutton. It is as a "wall of separation" set up between the elect and the reprobate. It is that "sea" of which the Psalmist speaks, and "which no creature can measure the depth, or the extent of." It is, in a word, an invincible obstacle, which separates infinitely the damned from their God, and which prevents them from touching His mercy by their cries and groans; while at the same time it closes up irrevocably the stream of graces and heavenly consolations.

3. Authors who have written on this frightful truth, not knowing by what means to convey some notion of it, have been obliged to have resource to comparisons and suppositions that are in some way within the reach of the human mind; and that are, as a consequence, as far removed from the reality as the being of God

is from that of the creature. Some have employed the example of a circle which is without end. Others have supposed as many ages as there are drops of water in the ocean, or atoms in the air. Others, again, have used other comparisons and suppositions. But the supposition that seems to carry the imagination farthest in this matter is that of a globe of sand, let it be a million times the size of this earth; and they would have a little bird appear every hundred thousand years and carry away in its beak a single grain of sand from the monstrous mass. Meanwhile, however immense may appear the time it would take the bird to carry away the globe of sand, this time would fall infinitely short of eternity; because between the finite and the infinite there is, and can be, absolutely no proportion.

See, dear Sisters, to what shifts the greatest intellects are reduced when they come to speak of eternity. There is no question here of days, years, ages, millions of ages. There is no question of space or time; no distinction of past, present, or future. Eternity has neither distinction nor division. It has no other space or measure than always and ever. It is, according to the famous definition of Boetius,

"an entire and perfect possession all at once, of an interminable existence."

II

1. Now, there is no truth more clearly established in the sacred text, than the eternity of the pains of hell. It would seem that our Blessed Lord, foreseeing the deceptions employed by the devil wherewith to beguile sinners in their evil ways, could not too often repeat this truth or employ terms clear enough to leave it without the smallest particle of doubt. In the sentence which He tells us that as Sovereign Judge He will pronounce against the wicked on the last day, He brings out as clear as words can put it, the eternity of their punishments. "Depart from Me, ye accursed," He shall say to them, "into fire eternal." And in a single chapter of the Gospel, the ninth of St. Mark, He repeats the same truth three times over. "If thy hand scandalize thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go to hell, into unquenchable fire, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished." And "if thy foot scandalize thee; cut it off! it

is better for thee to enter lame into life everlasting, than having two feet to be cast into the hell of unquenchable fire." And He adds for the second time: "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished." And "if thy eye is a source of sin to thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee with one eye to enter into the Kingdom of God, than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire." And He adds, for the third time: "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished."

How touching is this, my dearly beloved Sisters. What more could our amiable Saviour do; what could He say more pressing to convince us unanswerably of the terrors which await the wicked in hell?

After the clear teaching of our Blessed Lord in regard to the eternity of the torments of hell, I need not amplify the theological proofs which go to support this teaching. Let me only say that God's justice demands that sin be punished as much as it deserves, and as long as it exists, and is not destroyed. And as mortal sin is an offense of infinite malice, and as it shall exist always in the reprobate; since, moreover, being creatures, they are incapable of suffering an infinite punishment in themselves,

that punishment must be infinite in regard to its duration: that is to say, eternal!

2. So much for the truth of my subject. Now, of all the evils that afflict the damned in hell, there is not one so despair-provoking and intolerable as this. What a consolation it is to the poor prisoner, only to see his dungeon opened from time to time; or to the exile, to be able to hope for a return to his native land? What consolation to the poor sufferer to have a hope to see an end to his suffering? The damned are enchained in a frightful prison; they are exiles from their heavenly country; they are laden with all sorts of evils. Never shall there be for them an alleviation of their miseries. Never shall there be for them an approach to the abode of eternal happiness. They shall never see their prison doors unbarred. "The angel of the Lord," according to the sacred text, "has shut the gate of the abyss," where they are buried, and he has sealed the entrance to it with the seal of God of vengeance. In vain do they lift their hands towards the heavenly Jerusalem. In vain do they strive to approach it and to raise themselves thither. In vain do they sigh after the Sovereign God. There is for them no longer

any hope. Eternal wretchedness is their portion. There will always be between them and the elect an impassable barrier. The wall of their iniquities will never be thrown down.

And this frightful knowledge adds infinitely to their punishment. For eternity enters into all their torments. They suffer it, so to speak, whole and entire in each instant. And as eternity is infinite it renders all the pains of hell infinite likewise. And thus it is true to say that the damned suffer an eternal hunger, an eternal thirst, an eternal fire; or, what is the same thing, an infinite thirst, an infinite hunger, an infinite burning; and so of the other punishments, which will be equally infinite, because they will be eternal.

Eternity possesses them entirely. They are, as it were, swallowed up and lost in it. Their memory is filled with eternity. Their mind is incessantly applied to it. Their will is so much the more tormented by it, as it has a horror for them, and as it can in no wise be separated from them. And what is most frightful, they endure in some fashion an entire eternity each moment; and for this reason, that it enters into all their punishments, as we have already said, and as it impresses at each

instant of their punishment the frightful character of a duration without end.

3. Be not then, my dearly beloved, carried away by false teachers and by the delusion of the times. Rather let us all weep over our past sins and cry out to the Lord and say; "O Lord, deliver us from eternal death! Deliver us from Your anger justly enkindled against us! Turn not away from us Your adorable face. Deprive us not forever of Your loving presence. You created us for Your glory, and You prepared the abyss of Your vengeance only for the apostate angels. Permit not, then, that we should occupy in that sad abode the place due to our infidelities. Chastise us rather in this life. Here burn; here cut; here spare not. Let us bear the just punishment of our offences, by sickness, by poverty, by hunger, by all the other means that are most pleasing to Your Providence. But we implore You, through the mercy of Jesus Christ, through the saving efficacy of that salutary Name, and the prayers of His Holy Mother, spare us for eternity."

EIGHTEENTH CONFERENCE

THE MERCY OF GOD TOWARDS REPENTANT SINNERS

I

1. It will be a relief to us after the austere truths we have been contemplating, to turn to more cheerful subjects, and, first, the mercy of God to repentant sinners.

Mercy! What a soul-affecting word! How grateful to the poor culprit overwhelmed with the consciousness of his guilt! A world-famed poet has only paid it a just meed of praise when he says:

"The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes;
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. . . .
Mercy is above the sceptered sway of kings.
It is an attribute to God Himself."—

Yes, it is an attribute of God. And how has not this attribute of mercy been shown in all God's dealings with sinners in the past?

The history of the Old Testament points to innumerable instances of God's mercy to sinners, when they sought Him in the sincerity of their hearts. How many times did not His chosen people turn their backs upon him and transgress His laws? And after all that, when they returned to Him and besought Him for pardon, did He not lay aside all thought of resentment against them and remember only their former friendship and service?

See also how he showed mercy to the Ninivites. They were a pagan people, and for their sins God resolved to destroy their city. But at the preaching of the prophet, Jonas, they were terrified and converted. The king commanded a general fast to be observed by all the people. They covered themselves with sackcloth. They prayed with all their might. At the sight of their penitence the heart of God was softened. He turned aside the shafts of His anger that were ready to destroy them, and spared their city and themselves.

If, from instances of mercy shown by God to whole peoples, we turn to those shown to

individuals, here again how blessed the record! See King David, who fell into the crimes of adultery and murder. Scarcely had he returned to himself and cried out in compunction of heart, "I have sinned," when God sent the prophet Nathan to him to announce his pardon. See Manasses, King of Juda, a man steeped in all manner of crimes. At his repentance he is not only received to pardon, but even raised again by God to the throne he had filled so unworthily before.

It was in this character of most indulgent father that God loved to be known to the Jews. It was in this character that He inspired the prophets to represent Him most frequently in their addresses to the people. "Oh, the Lord, the Lord God," cries out Moses in a transport of gratitude, "merciful, and gracious, and patient, and of much compassion, and true; who keepeth mercy unto thousands; who taketh away wickedness, and iniquity, and sin!" Hence, the Psalmist says of Him: "His justice is from the abyss; but His mercy is spread over all His works." "The whole earth," he says again, "is full of the mercy of the Lord." Thus, finally, in that lovely Psalm that He inspired to the penitent King, after preparing

him for forgiveness by sentiments of profound contrition: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquities; for I know my sin, and my iniquity is always before me," He takes care to have it promulgated to all posterity that "a contrite and humble heart He will never despise."

2. But if the goodness and mercy of God are everywhere manifested in the Old Testament which after all was the "law of fear," it is in the New, that the Almighty gives full scope to the promptings of His love, and that its effects are more especially manifested.

The whole scheme of the Incarnation, is it not a grand manifestation of God's mercy to sinners? Consider the whole public life of Christ, was it not spent on behalf of sinners? "I am come," He says, "to call, not the just, but sinners, to repentance." And in fulfilling this noble mission, does He not try by every device to encourage them to come to Him and to have confidence in Him? And so remarkable was His conduct towards them that one of the principal accusations brought against Him by His enemies—accusations, mark you, that

He never tried to refute—was that He was "the friend of publicans and sinners."

His loveliest and most soul-inspiring parables are those in which He represents His love for sinners. Thus, He pictures Himself at one time as the Good Shepherd, come down from Heaven in search of His lost sheep; and leaving the ninety-nine in the desert He wanders among thickets and briars, in lonely dells and over rough mountain sides, till at last He finds it. And taking it upon His shoulders He carries it back in triumph, and invites His friends to rejoice with Him, for that "He has found His sheep that was lost."

Again, He is the Good Samaritan, come down from the holy city of Jerusalem to pour oil and wine upon the wounds of poor stricken humanity, fallen among the infernal robbers. Or, He is the tender father receiving back again His prodigal son, and welcoming him to the home he had so unworthily abandoned.

You all remember that famous parable—the insolence, the ingratitude, the selfishness of that young boy; the tenderness, the grief of his aged father; how the prodigal, grasping his moneybags, departed into a far-distant country, where he squandered his patrimony in

gambling and in the company of bad women. Being in a short time reduced to the extremity of want, he is compelled to hire himself out to one of the inhabitants of that strange country, and is sent to herd swine. So wretched does he become that he would fain satisfy his hunger with the coarse husks the swine did eat. In his sad plight "he entered into himself" yes, he entered into himself. Oh how much there is contained in those few words! he entered into himself, and he recollected how many servants there were in his father's house who were happy and well-treated, while he perished of hunger. At last he resolved within himself, and said: "I will go to my father, and I will say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee. I am not worthy to be called thy child. Make me as one of thy hired servants' "; and he set out on his journey.

Meantime, the grief-stricken father scanned the horizon seeking the return of his son. And one day seeing him in the distance he recognized him in spite of his haggard features and his tattered garments; he ran to him and threw himself upon his neck and kissed him. And he

put shoes on his feet, and a ring upon his finger, and he covered him with "the first robe," and he ordered the fatted calf to be killed, and that all should make merry, for, as he said: "My son was lost, and he has been found; he was dead, and he has come to life again." It is all but the elaborate portrayal of God's mercy as shown to repentant sinners.

3. The sacred writers of the New Testament seem never wearied with relating the wonders of love and mercy of the Saviour towards poor sinners. Thus, they represent Him at one time as sitting on Jacob's well, faint from fatigue and hunger, waiting for the Samaritan woman to convert and save her; at another, as undertaking a long journey in order to cure the daughter of an idolatrous woman possessed by a devil. Now, we see Him deliver from sin and from the accusations of her enemies the woman taken in adultery. Again, he promises salvation to Zachaeus, the chief of the publicans of Jericho, on the instant that he resolves to restore his ill-gotten goods and become converted.

But perhaps the most conspicuous instance of our Lord's mercy to sinners is that which

recorded in the Gospel concerning the glorious penitent, Mary Magdalen.

She was a woman of good family, well instructed according to the notions of her time, and brought up in the traditions of a pious Jewish household. She had even greater facilities for becoming virtuous than most of the Jewish maidens of her time. For she lived at no great distance from the Temple, at that time the center of the one true religion in the world, the home of sanctity in which God Himself dwelt and was worshipped with supreme magnificence. But it was her misfortune to allow herself to be hurried along in a mad career of indulgence. I refrain from describing further that career to which the advantages of leisure, wealth, and beauty, only acted as incentives. Suffice it to say, she was commonly known according to the words of the Gospel, by the appellation of "the sinner" and was "possessed of seven devils," who are the presiding patrons of the seven deadly sins.

It was while the Saviour was dining with the Pharisees at Naim, that this woman, stricken with the consciousness of her awful state, made her way into the apartment where Jesus was. And heedless of the uncharitable judgments of

those present, with a boldness begotten of deep contrition, she cast herself at His feet, bathed them with a deluge of tears, and dried them with her tresses.

No more is required. The grace of Jesus Christ had brought her to her present state of tears and regret. The "fountains of the great deep" of the infinitely charitable heart of the Saviour are moved with compassion towards her. He cannot restrain the outpourings of His generous love, and forgetting all the infamies of the wicked past, He mingles the tears of His compassion with those of her sorrow. He extends the hand of forgiveness over her, and pronounces those words of absolution, that her sins are entirely pardoned her, and that she is preferred in the esteem of her God to him who had prided Himself on His life-long fidelity to the Law. "Oh, the Lord, the Lord God! merciful, and gracious, and patient, and of much compassion, and true, who keepeth mercy unto thousands, who taketh away iniquity, and wickedness and sin." Who would not admire the Saviour's kindness to repentant sinners? Who would not take heart, in spite of his miseries, and come with unbounded confidence to the God of mercy?

II

1. But, dearly beloved, what shows the Saviour's kindness to be truly infinite and worthy of His Divinity is this, that this "merciful and compassionate God" has not circumscribed the exercise of His mercy to any time, place, or people; but has wished that it be manifested to all tribes, and tongues, and generations, even to the end of time. To this effect it was that our blessed Saviour, before His departure from this world, was pleased to institute an order of men gifted with His own power and animated with His spirit, who should exercise in His behalf this quality of mercy towards their fellow men.

This order, which in some manner perpetuates the benign presence of Christ among men, and which still carries on the work of His ministry, is the priesthood of the holy Catholic Church. And thus the Saviour on the day of the Resurrection breathed upon His Apostles, who were the representatives of the priesthood of all future ages, and said to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them"; and by that mysterious sign, and by the efficacy of those

words, He gave power to those men, and through them to their successors to the end of time, the divine power and the jurisdiction which He Himself possessed to release souls from sin.

This power, as all the world knows, is that which is exercised by priests in the sacred tribunal of penance. Thus it is that no matter how imperfect you may have been in the course of your past life; no matter how deeply you may have fallen, had you given as much scandal as Mary the sinner, if you take heart and rise from your sins, and come to Christ in the person of His minister with sentiments of contrition, the absolution of God's representative will restore you to His grace, and will give your poor troubled soul the sweet feeling of peace.

Nay, more, dear Sisters, and what is no less consoling is that this God of mercy has not only endowed His priesthood with the divine power of forgiving sins; He has further communicated to them His spirit of mercy in dealing with sinners; so that, even if the priest be by nature a man of stern, severe temperament, or of an unforgiving nature, from the moment that he sits in the tribunal of penance he is re-

minded that he is the representative of a God of boundless mercy who was the "friend of publicans and sinners"; of a God who not only forgave the repentant Peter, but raised him to the dignity of head of His Church; who made Saul, the blasphemer, and cruel persecutor of His people to be a "vessel of election" to carry the glory of His name among the gentiles; who made the generous Magdalen the favorite amongst His followers; honored her with the special privilege of being an apostle to the apostles themselves, the first witness of His Resurrection, and who afterwards raised her to the sublimest heights of contemplation.

2. Such is the power of the priesthood, and such must be the spirit that should animate the faithful priest in the discharge of his spiritual functions. And though he be a judge of souls, still he must remember that he is a judge of mercy and the representative of a God who knew but to forgive, and to compassionate the fallen.

Such, dearly beloved Sisters, is my mission among you to-day, sent by the Church which carries on the benign work of Jesus Christ on earth. Like our Divine Master, I can say: "I am come to call, not the just, but sinners

to repentance." Lay hold then on the grace of the holy exercises we are going through.

"Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation." If up to the present time you have little corresponded with the graces of your high vocation, fear not; God sends you in these days an extraordinary grace in this your annual retreat.

Be not held back by the remembrance of your past sins. Prepare your souls by prayer and penance, and "if your sins were as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; and if they were as crimson, they shall be made white as wool." Washed and made clean in the "Blood of the Lamb," you will be enabled to walk worthily on earth, and will be prepared for reception into the company of the saints, rejoicing with Jesus Christ, who reigns, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God for ever and ever.

NINETEENTH CONFERENCE

COMPUNCTION

"I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul." (*Ps. XXXVIII, 15.*)

I

1. Thus spoke the pious King Ezechias, when told by the Prophet Isaias that he was about to die. He reflected that he was about to appear before the judgment seat of God, to whom he would have to render an account of all his thoughts and words, and actions. And looking back on his life, and being conscious to himself of his many delinquencies, he reflected on them in sorrow and contrition of heart. "I will recount to thee all my years," he says, "in the bitterness of my soul."

We also, dearly beloved, should imitate the conduct of the pious King of Juda; for, to us, too, the inexorable word has been spoken:

"Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live."

In fact one of the great objects of the annual retreat is to give us an opportunity to "take order with the house" of our conscience, and to prepare us for a happy death. To this effect all the exercises, all the prayers and meditations of the retreat are ordered.

We have now gone through the first part of our retreat, the part which deals with those subjects that ascetic writers tell us pertain to the purgative life or way. And, first, we took a survey of the end laid out for us in the counsels of God, the great end of our creation, and we saw that that end was the highest and noblest that it was in God's power to lay out for us,—to be united to Him and possess Him for all eternity. To fit us for this end He endowed us with transcendant faculties; those, namely, of mind and freewill. We considered the Christian, and the interior and religious life, the life divine to which through His overwhelming bounty to us we are called, and the virtues we are to practise, and the measures we are to take in order to live up to its requirements. We considered the great obstacle to the attainment of the end of the Christian and

religious life, namely, sin, together with its accompaniments, death, judgment, and hell, the ultimate of the penalties awarded it.

2. It becomes our duty now with Ezechias to take a general survey of our whole past lives, and to meditate profoundly on God's goodness to us, on the one hand, and, on the other, on our ingratitude, our vile treachery to Him, I should rather say; and the punishments we deserve for this, our life of sinfulness and crime.

Prostrate, therefore, in humble acknowledgment before God, let us, in the first place, call to mind the many benefits He has conferred on us from the beginning in calling us to the faith, in preference to the many millions whom He has allowed to grow up in the darkness of paganism and unbelief. Oh, what a grace to be born of good Catholic parents, who were devoted to their religion and who gave us such an example of piety and virtue. How many blessings did He not confer on us in those years! the early and frequent reception of the Sacraments; the lights and instructions, and calls to virtue; and the holy examples of others. And then did He not in our early youth inspire us with the thought of entering the

religious state and devoting ourselves wholly to His service? And what sweetnesses in those days, and what testimonies of His love! And from how many dangers did He not preserve us,—dangers which assailed, aye, and swept into sin and hell many of our less-favored companions? Do we reflect sufficiently and with thankfulness to God on the many favors of those years? And, lastly, recall the inexhaustible supply of graces conferred on us by God in holy religion; the high ideals that were put before us during the formative years of our religious life; the holy examples of the lives of the religious of past generations, and the beautiful tradition of holiness coming down to us from the saints of our own and other religious orders; the many lights and graces conferred on us individually, and of which no one has been made cognisant; the many corrections and instructions of our superiors in religion; their care and providence over us to preserve us from sin; the many customs and observances with which holy Church hedges us round for our protection, and the rich treasury of graces laid open to us in the reception of the Sacraments; God Himself, moreover, dwelling in the midst of us as our

Protector and Father. For all these lights and graces let us thank God from the bottom of our hearts, and give praise to his holy name, "for, that He is good, for that His mercy endureth forever."

3. After that, let us reflect profoundly and with a deep sorrow over our many infidelities to grace in every stage of our career; the anger and disobedience and petulancy of our childhood; the many vanities of our youth; our resistances to the inspirations of grace; the multiplied enormities, perhaps, of our more mature years.

Oh, with deep contrition of heart let us recall our daily infidelities to grace in holy religion; our disobedience to rule; the little piety of our lives; our imperfect preparation for the reception of the Sacraments; our want of earnestness in striving for perfection; and let us realize that all this would lead to hell and damnation, were it not for the overwhelming power of God's saving grace.

Nor are we to rest here, but with the pious King of Juda, we must take the resolution of "going down even to the gates of hell." Reflect that one day, soon—perhaps very soon,

you will be lying on your death bed, and that the words will be addressed to you; "Take order with the house of thy conscience; for now thou shalt die and not live." What will then be your thoughts concerning the life that is now past for you? Represent to yourself the place prepared for you in the abyss, and the agonies of the damned, and cry out in the words of Scripture: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" "Save me, O Lord, for Thy mercy's sake!" "I am penetrated with the fear of Thy judgments!" "Let me not perish, O Lord, for evermore!" "Out of the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." . . . "If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities; Lord, who shall stand it?"

Recall to your memory and repeat over and over again the many contrite passages from the Psalms, and the Gospels, and the other books of Sacred Scripture. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out mine iniquity; wash me more and more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; for I know my sin, and my

iniquity is always before me! Against Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee!"

4. Here let me remark that our thoughts are not to be given exclusively to the contemplation of our past sins; and those passages expressing deep contrition are to be mingled with ones expressing joy of heart, resolution, and a holy hope. "I will arise and will go to my Father, and will say to him: 'Father I have sinned against Heaven and before thee. I am not worthy to be called thy child; make me as one of thy hired servants." And again, "I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, whence help shall come to me." "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made Heaven and earth." "He shall not suffer my foot to be moved, nor shall He slumber that keepeth me." "The Lord is my keeper; whom shall I fear?" "Behold, as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, and as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord, our God, until He have mercy on us."

Thus, dearly beloved, we should mingle deep sentiments of humility and contrition with the strong cry of prayer and trust; saying with the

chastened king: "The enemy said to me in my distress; 'I shall not see the Lord God in the land of the living"; but still, "my eyes are weakened looking upwards; Lord I suffer violence; answer Thou for me." "Thou has delivered my soul that it should not perish, Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." . . . "O Lord save me, and we will sing our psalms all the days of our life in the house of the Lord."

5. To exercises of this kind, dearly beloved Sisters, this day is to be devoted, so that, stirred to the very depths, and penetrated with compunction for our past sins, we may move Almighty God to take pity on us, purify our hearts from earthly tendencies, and enlighten the eyes of our soul to contemplate with profit the high and holy subjects that are to follow: those, namely, that have immediate relation to the religious life, the life divine which we are called to lead, and which we have chosen to be our portion for the here and the hereafter.

TWENTIETH CONFERENCE

CONFESSION

"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." (*John I, 9.*)

I

1. In those words, St. John in his catholic Epistle gives us the most consoling promise that God will pardon us our sins on condition that we on our part confess them faithfully to His minister. They are words of most assured hope and consolation to us, who have unhappily offended the Divine majesty. And in this our good God has left us the most convincing proof of His love and good will towards us, that, after we had sinned and merited His chastisements, He has left us a safe and easy remedy for our evils.

But in order that we may profit by this remedy, we must know how to employ it rightly,

and this is what I purpose to show you in this conference.

2. You all know what confession is. There is no practice better known, or, I dare say, more consoling to the Christian. There is nothing better known in the Church than the practice of confession; but I regret I must add, there is at the same time nothing worse known than the manner of making it well. Just as we find in the world people who pass all their lives in certain states, and yet who can never succeed, whether through indolence or dullness, in discharging properly the duties of those states—just as we find laboring men, for instance, who can never execute properly the directions of their masters; just as we find tradesmen who can never finish properly the work they have on hand; just as we find housekeepers who can never manage to keep dirt and disorder from their homes; so there is nothing more common than to meet with people who go frequently to confession, and yet who can never execute properly the commands of Jesus Christ in regard to confession; who never put themselves to the trouble of preparing properly for it; who can never rid their souls of the dirt and disorder of mortal sin.

Now, confession to be good and efficacious, must have two grand conditions,—it must be sorrowful, and it must be entire. It must be sorrowful. In other words, we must bring to confession true sentiments of contrition for our sins.

Contrition is defined to be "a heartfelt sorrow and detestation of sin, . . . with a firm resolution of amendment."

It is a sorrow, that is to say, it is a grief of heart, because of our having done a thing, which we ought not to have done—of our having offended our God. And truly if we consider what sin is, and what God, to whom sin is opposed, is in Himself and in regard to us, we shall have little difficulty in conceiving this sorrow. What is God? He is the Sovereign Being: the Being above all beings; the Being infinite in all perfections. Power, wisdom, goodness, holiness, truth; these are His attributes, and these He possesses in a sovereign degree.

He is, moreover, our Creator, our Benefactor, and our Last End. He is our Creator, I say. "He made us and not we ourselves." He is our Benefactor. From Him we have received all things—our being, all temporal

goods: those of nature and fortune; spiritual goods: those pertaining to mind and free will; and, lastly, supernatural goods: those of grace, to which is attached our title to eternal glory. And, finally, He is our Last End. "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord," says St. Augustine, "and we can never rest until we rest in Thee."

Sin enters in and disturbs all those relations. It is an uprising of our will against God, and an assertion of our right to act as we please, ignoring the claims of His supreme will. For such a rupture of our relations with God, for such an act of rebellion against Him, is it not right that we conceive sorrow and regret?

It is a heartfelt sorrow; that is, a sorrow that is not merely expressed in words, but felt interiorly, and that produces a grinding and pulverizing of our feelings; and, hence, its name, "Contrition."

This heartfelt sorrow God and nature require, and hence, when the prophet preached repentance to the people, he called out to them: "Be converted to the Lord in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments and turn ye truly to the Lord."

Do you want an example of one animated with such a sorrow? Hear the penitent David, as he weeps over his past sins: "Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?" And again, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity. Wash me more and more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. . . . Against Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee."

II

1. Our confession must be entire. Now, when I say that our confession must be entire I mean that it must embrace all mortal sins committed since Baptism and not already validly confessed, which we can call to memory after a careful examination of conscience. This is a condition that is required of us from the very nature of the Sacrament of Penance, for, when our Lord gives power to priests to

forgive sins, He endows them with judicial authority, that is to say, He constitutes them judges of souls. Now, this being so, how are confessors to exercise their office of judges if the sins of their penitents be not made known to them in their entirety? They cannot pronounce sentence on those penitents without having first submitted to them the nature of their sins and the amount of their guilt. Therefore, must the penitent act the part of accuser and witness against himself. Therefore, is it his bounden duty to make an entire and faithful declaration of his sins to the confessor. Neither is there any other way open to sinners to obtain pardon of their sins. For if there were, they would naturally shirk the painful and humiliating ordeal of confession, and thus the Sacrament of Penance would become useless and illusory for the greater part of those for whom it was instituted.

2. Our confession must be entire. Now, that our confession be entire it must be a faithful manifestation of our known mortal sins, such as after a careful examination we see them in our consciences. *"Quorum sunt in consciencia"* (Rit. Rom.). This is an important point and one on which a great many de-

ceive themselves, alas, to the profanation of the Sacrament and their own spiritual ruin. How many go to confession and fail to declare the sins of which they are conscious? Through self-love and want of humility they cloak their sins, they palliate them, the things that are hard to tell they either conceal entirely or tell them in such a way as to mystify the confessor, and thus this salutary Sacrament becomes for them a curse, rather than a blessing, since they receive it only to profane it.

Sins are to be told such as we see them in our conscience. Now, our conscience, being a true witness of our guilt, gives testimony in two ways: *viz.*, as to the species of our sins, and as to their number; *i. e.*, as to the kinds of sins we have fallen into and as to the number of times we have fallen into each kind.

First, as to the species: It cannot be unknown to you that sins differ in their character. This difference arises from their opposition to different virtues, or to different commandments. Well, such as is their different character, which arises, as I have said, from their opposition to different virtues or to different precepts, they constitute different species of sin. Thus a sin of injustice is differ-

ent from a sin of anger; a sin of disobedience is different from a sin of infidelity; a sin of lying is different from a sin of intemperance, and so of others. Nay, there may be many species of sin committed against any one commandment or against any single virtue. Thus, for instance, with regard to the sixth commandment, there are sins of thought and sins of desire, sins committed by oneself, sins committed in complicity with others, together with subdivisions of those sins according to the quality of those others or of ourselves; subdivisions, moreover, of sins of desire corresponding to external actions.

See, dear Sisters, how many different species of sin may come under the one heading, and yet on each of these species must the confessor give judgment. Each of those species of sin, then, that we are guilty of must be clearly declared to the priest, though in becoming language, to answer to the requirements of the divine law of confession, as expounded in the decrees of the Council of Trent.

3. Again, the number of sins must be told in confession—and this is a point I wish particularly to direct your attention to, for, alas, many come to confesssion who examine themselves

not at all as to the number of their sins. Those expose themselves to the danger of making their confessions invalid, since this is of strict requirement in the Sacrament. Every mortal sin is an act of distinct malice against God. It makes a great difference, therefore, to say whether that act has been committed one, two, or ten times, in the acknowledgment that must be made of it to God's representative to whom we apply for pardon. It will not do, then, to give merely the species of sin, we must tell as exactly as we can the number of times we have been guilty of each particular species of sin.

Confess your sins, then, dear Sisters, with fidelity and in their integrity. Say with the Royal Prophet: "I will confess against myself my iniquity before the Lord." He says, *"against myself,"* to show that he did not plead in his own cause to avoid the correction that he deserved. He continues, *"before the Lord."* Now, what one does "for the Lord" or "before the Lord," he must do faithfully, lest he merit the curse pronounced by the Wise Man against those who do the work of the Lord negligently. If you so confess your sins, you can say after confession what the prophet

adds: and "you, O Lord, have pardoned me the malice of my sins." God will grant you grace and mercy and will put you in the way that leads to salvation.

TWENTY-FIRST CONFERENCE

TEMPTATIONS

I

1. The Gospels tell us of many wonderful things performed by our Lord during the course of His life. They tell us, for instance, of how He changed water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee—of how He walked on the waters—of how He stilled the tempest—of how He was transfigured on Mount Thabor—of how He raised the dead to life, and performed other wonderful miracles. These are very striking acts, indeed, and they go to prove His absolute power over nature and that He was divine. But there is one thing told of our blessed Lord which, to me at least, appears more remarkable than any of these; it is that which is narrated in the fourth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, where the Saviour is led into the desert, "to be tempted by the devil." This, I say, is the most remark-

able thing told of our blessed Lord in the Gospels.

That He should change water into wine is not wonderful, since He was gifted with divine power. That He should walk upon the waters, or still the angry elements, is not wonderful, since He is the Master of the elements. That He should raise the dead to life or perform other miracles is but what we might expect, since He is the Lord of nature and the Giver of life. That He should be transfigured, and that the Divinity should shine in Him, we should not wonder at, since He is the Son of God. Indeed, the wonder is that in Him the Divinity should be hidden under the covering of humanity, and that the glory of the Godhead should not be manifest in Him at all times.

But this is remarkable beyond all that we can conceive: that He who is sanctity itself, the all-pure, all-holy Son of God, should allow Himself to be tempted by the devil. For what alliance can there be between the Son of God and that foul spirit? Such a thing, we know, was not due to Him. For, though He became in all things like us, "yet without sin," says the great Apostle, His infinite holiness could not

let it approach Him; could not brook even that His holy Mother should for a moment be defiled with it. And yet, though without sin, the Saviour of the world would submit to the temptation of it. And this He did for our sake, in order, namely, that He might teach us by His example how we are to overcome it.

2. It was very charitable, dear Sisters, and very condescending on Our Lord's part thus to allow Himself to be tempted for our sakes. For there is no man without temptation. Temptation tries all men. Temptation was found amongst the angels long ago and laid desolate the very courts of the Lord. Temptation entered Paradise, we know with what disastrous consequences to the whole human race. Temptation was found in the very school of Jesus Christ and laid low not only Judas, but even Peter, the cornerstone on which the Church was built. Temptation enters the holiest places, comes upon us at the most consecrated moments, invades the holiest states. It tries us especially and with greatest vehemence when we become converted to a better life and propose to ourselves to attain perfection. Of this we are warned in Scripture. "When thou

beginnest to serve God," says St. James, "prepare thy soul for temptation." And no wonder. For the arch-enemy cannot without envy see the soul enter on the way of perfection; and hence he tries most vehemently to enslave such a one before it attains the strength begotten of sanctity.

We read in the *Moralia* of St. Gregory how a holy man, entering a certain city, found a devil lolling lazily at the gates, while around a religious house further on was a whole concourse of devils engaged in tempting the inmates. And we read in the Lives of the Saints of the violent and extraordinary temptations to which many of them were subjected by the devil.

You will then, dear Sisters, have to expect temptations, and strong ones, and you will meet them everywhere—here in your convent, it may be, from the imperfections of your Sisters who will break rule freely, and invite you to join them in so doing; in the school, at recreation, on your journeys, etc., etc.

Temptations, then, you will meet with at every step and in every circumstance of your career. The devil, the great arch-enemy of

man, will assail you. "For our warfare is not with flesh and blood; but with principalities and powers, the rulers of this dark world."

The world will tempt you,—that great sinful world which contradicts the teaching of Jesus Christ, and which, therefore, has merited His reprobation. See how the world conducts itself in regard to virtue—the many snares it lays for souls to catch and enslave them, in its customs, in its literature, in its art, its pictures, its statues, in its journals, in its amusements, in its conversations, in the things it not only tolerates, but encourages. Oh, "love not the world," or the things of the world; for "if any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him."

But even if we had no evil spirits to tempt us; even if there were no world to scandalize us; if we were caught up into the air and transported into a region where neither man nor devil could follow us, still would we have reason to fear. For we have within us that which will tempt us powerfully, our own unsubdued flesh—that foul, earthly thing with animal passions and vile inclinations which we call the body. Yes, for though we are redeemed by Jesus Christ, though we were regenerated by

Baptism, yet does there dwell in us the *"fomes peccati,"* the incentive to sin, the concupiscence of the flesh, of which the Apostle so often complains.

Temptations you will meet with at every step and in every circumstance of your career. And it was very charitable of our Lord, to teach us by His own example how we are to repel them.

3. But though we may expect temptations, and strong ones, at every stage of our lives, this ought not to discourage us; for God will give us grace to overcome them. And this, dear Sisters, ought to be our greatest consolation—the thought that God will not abandon us, but, if we are faithful to grace, will make issue with the temptation, so that it may not overcome us.

Nay, more, if God permits us to be tempted, He has given us in temptation the opportunity of gaining most glorious victories over our spiritual enemies. Most glorious victories, I say, for the least victory gained in the spiritual life is indeed more glorious than all the triumphs of the heroes.

The least thing that concerns the spiritual life is more important than the most important things that concern the things of this

world. A temptation overcome, therefore, by an old woman or a little child, is more glorious than the greatest triumphs of warriors. For what do the victories of warriors concern? The extending of the limits of the territories of peoples merely. And a victory gained over temptation—what? The extension of the territory of God Himself; the territory won by the combats and death of Jesus Christ.

Still further, He has given in temptation the opportunity of gaining untold merits, of adding gems to our crown of glory; of winning crowns immortal.

It is told in the lives of the Fathers of the desert how one day a holy old man saw in vision seven most resplendent crowns prepared for a young man who had put himself under his direction. Struck with amazement at the sight, he asked the young man, when he came at evening for his blessing, what he had been doing during the day. "Father," he said, "I was engaged, as on the preceding days, in the work imposed on me by your orders." Being pressed still further, he told how during the day he had been grievously tempted seven times, but, by the grace of God, had been vic-

torious. And here his superior saw the exemplar of his vision.

You see, then, that temptation is not an unmixed evil; but, through the providence of God, it has been made to serve as the instrument of our highest good.

II

1. But in order that it may be so, and that we may gain the mastery over it, two things are to be observed by us; and though these may be put briefly, they contain volumes of wisdom.

These two things are: first, we must never thrust ourselves unnecessarily into its occasions, and, secondly, when temptation does come on us unsought and undesired, we must fight it promptly, vigorously and perseveringly. We must never put ourselves unnecessarily in the occasion of temptation. To do so would be to court disaster, to land ourselves in a position where only a miracle of God could save us. What would you think of the conduct of a man who cast himself headlong from the brink of a precipice, expecting that God

would send his angels to save him? A greater folly he commits who goes wilfully and unnecessarily to meet temptation. He expects that God will work a miracle to deliver him from the consequences of his folly.

When, dear Sisters, you are sent to a post of danger, God will be with you to protect you. He will give you the grace belonging to your state, the grace to meet the occasion. But wilfully and unnecessarily expose yourself to the same danger on another occasion, and you fall miserably, shamefully! Who was more valiant than David? Who, more wise than Solomon? Who, stronger than Samson? And yet these great men, who had come unscathed out of a thousand dangers which they encountered at the call of duty, fell, and fell shamefully. And why? Because they exposed themselves unnecessarily to the occasion.

And here, dearly beloved, let me call your attention to a thing you may not have adverted to before; it is that he who wilfully and unnecessarily exposes himself to the danger of sin, has already fallen, has already sinned. For the moral law forbids us not only to commit sin; it forbids us, further, to expose ourselves unnecessarily to the occasions of sin.

Mark well what I say. He who wilfully exposes himself to the risk of falling into sin is already guilty of sin, has already sinned. He is guilty of a sin against the virtue which he exposed himself to the risk of violating; and he is guilty, moreover, of a sin of presumption, in expecting that God would deliver him from the inevitable consequences of his foolish conduct. You, then, who wilfully expose yourselves to the occasion; know for certain that by so doing, by merely exposing yourself to the risk of sin, unnecessarily, you are guilty before God and merit His condemnation.

2. Again, I have said that when temptation comes upon us without our seeking, we must meet it promptly, vigorously, and perseveringly. We must meet temptation promptly. Some people, when temptation comes upon them, dally with it, and neglect to reject it promptly. They allow it to take possession successively of their senses, their imagination, their mind; and only when it presses for the consent of their will, do they rouse themselves to repel it. Now, those allow an undue advantage to the tempter. Our souls with their faculties and powers may be compared to a fortified city surrounded with entrenchments.

Travel across the continent of Europe, through the territory of one of the great military nations. You approach one of the great fortified cities—Metz, Strasburg, Paris, Rome. Miles before you come to the city proper you see every elevation crowned with ugly fortifications, whose sides bristle with artillery. And as you are borne along, you pass through, again and yet again, systems of encircling fortifications, till at last you approach the great walls dug into the earth, so as to be sheltered from assault, by the accompanying fosse or ditch; and, lastly, on the most advantageous site dominating the entire city, the citadel, the last great defence to which the defending army can retire in case of their being driven from the earthworks without. Our souls, with their powers and faculties, may be compared to such a fortification.

Now, what would you say of the military commander who, being charged with the defence of such a fortress, would allow the enemy to attack the outworks and capture them in detail without making an effort to repel him, and only when he made an assault on the city itself, would rouse himself to strike a blow for

the safety of the place and its inhabitants? Well, such is the conduct of one who allows temptation to take possession of his senses, his imagination, his mind, without at once rising to repel it.

No; dear Sisters, we must meet the enemy at the outposts, and, like courageous defenders, dispute the country inch by inch. Or, rather, if we are faithful in repelling temptation promptly, God's grace will enable us to prevent it from coming within striking distance of the citadel of our souls.

3. We must fight temptation vigorously. The instinct of self-preservation impels us to repel the assassin who with lethal weapon makes an assault on us; and shall we not resist vigorously temptation, which is the assassin of our souls? Yes, temptation is the assassin of our souls, and it comes with the intent to deprive us of our true life—the grace of God. At its onslaught, then, should not concern for our immortal souls, which are in peril, rouse all our energy and zeal; and should we not muster all our powers in defence of that which is the centre of our being, our very self? Nor should we desist from prayer and self-

circumspection till, finally, the enemy is put to ignominious flight and our souls left in peace and triumph!

4. And, lastly, we must meet temptation perseveringly. Some fight temptation vigorously for a time; but at length they grow tired, lay down their arms, and yield to its seductions. To say the least, this is a cowardly and ignominious ending to a beginning that promised well. But when we consider the tremendous issues that are at stake in regard to our immortal souls, then such a consummation becomes in the last degree sad and deplorable.

Take example, then, from your Captain and Commander, Jesus Christ, and fight temptation zealously at all times. Avoid, as far as may be, its assaults, and never thrust yourself foolishly to its occasions. But if it comes upon you, as it will, unsought and undesired, then, like courageous soldiers, meet it; aye, meet it promptly, vigorously, and perseveringly. Thus will you overcome; and merit the reward promised by St. James in his Epistle: "Blessed is the man who suffereth temptation; for, when he shall overcome, he shall obtain the crown, the crown of life, which God has prepared for those that love Him."

TWENTY-SECOND CONFERENCE

HEAVEN

"And the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them was taken up into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God." (*Mark XVI, 19.*)

I

1. It is usual with military commanders to encourage the soldiers under their command to bear the fatigues of war by holding out to them the glory of conquest and the fair provinces that are to be the prize of the victors. Preachers and spiritual writers are wont at times to employ a like device to animate the faithful, —representing to them the rewards Christ has in store for those who serve Him loyally here below. Those rewards I would recount today if words were given me to describe their grandeur. The occasion is opportune when, as we may hope, you all have gone through a most fervent retreat and have made strong

resolutions for the future government of your lives.

But why, it may be asked, endeavor to describe what is ineffable, and whose beauty no created intelligence can conceive? When of old God vouchsafed a glimpse of His heavenly kingdom to one who was destined to undergo unheard-of trials for His sake, this man, returned from his transport, could give no other account of what he saw than by exclaiming: "Neither had eye seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things God has prepared for those who love him." Yes, no human eye has ever seen a beauty like to that with which God ravishes the blessed. No created ear has ever heard music to be compared to that which rings through the vaults of Paradise. "The heart of man," no created intellect is capable to conceive a thought that can convey the faintest resemblance of those delights that intoxicate the friends of God in heaven. It is with those delights as it is with God Himself. So great, so transcendent are they, that we shall need "the Light of Glory"—a Divine quality, to be communicated to our souls, to enable them to gaze upon His essence, and to bear the

overpowering sweetness of their transports.

2. But though we cannot, by words, picture anything to resemble these joys; yet, Holy Scripture lets us know in what the essential glory of the blessed consists. It is in nothing else than in the vision of God, which transforms them and makes them like to Himself. This, St. John tells us in his First Epistle, where he says: "We shall be like to Him [God], because we shall see Him as He is." (1 John III, 2.)

We shall, then, see God in Heaven. This is the essential part of the felicity of the blessed. "We shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is." That invisible God, who has hidden Himself from us for so many ages, that God in whom we believe, of whom we have heard so many wonders, will manifest Himself to us in all the beauty of His Divine Essence. "All that we have heard of Him," says the prophet, "we shall see in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God."

Here on earth we see Him, "only, as it were, in a glass, darkly," according to the expression of the Apostle. He veils His glory behind the covering of earthly beauty. He clouds His majesty under sensible representa-

tions. "The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament declares the work of His hands." But in Heaven, that veil will be raised, that cloud will be dissipated. There will be there neither mirror, nor picture, nor cloud, nor covering. We shall see Him as He is. We shall gaze upon His essence. We shall meet Him face to face. Yes, we shall see that vast extent of being and perfection that knows no limit, that immense illimitable ocean of greatness and power, those inexhaustible treasures of knowledge and beauty. That sweetness, those charms of a God as amiable as He is great will be lavished upon us, and will be presented unreservedly to our mind; because we shall see God "as He is," simple, indivisible, and embracing in one perfection, unique and illimitable, all imaginable perfections, or, rather, perfections which we are not capable of conceiving.

3. Oh, dearly beloved, if the sight of earthly beauty delights us; if the pomp and magnificence of royal state; if the heavens and the glories which embellish them; if the order and harmony of the universe; if the splendor of sunshine; if the view of mountain, and wood, and sea, and meadow, and flower; if all this

can dazzle for a time, and cause transports,—what will it be to see God, the Source of all charms, the Soul of all beauty, the Designer of all loveliness, the Creator of all those earthly beauties; to see Him in all His glory, in all the splendor that surrounds Him; "as He is," in a word, and as He ravishes with delight all the blessed who contemplate Him for ages, and who each moment discover in Him new charms.

If truth, all difficult as it is to attain, ungrateful fruit of a study austere and laborious —what do I say? if a phantom of truth is sought after with eagerness, if valuable lives are consumed in its pursuit; what will it be to see in God TRUTH itself—to see those eternal concepts that directed His power in the construction of the universe, the order and motives of His impenetrable decrees, that chain of means which His providence employs to lead created things to their end in a manner so sweet and yet so powerful; to see in God, as in its source, without pain, without labor, without danger of error, in all its extent, in all its brilliancy, in all its evidence, that fugitive truth which has so long escaped our impotent researches?

If the knowledge obtained by faith, meager

as it is, is so enrapturing that the saints looking through its sombre light can see in God beauties that ravish them and permit them no longer to occupy themselves with the sight and knowledge of any other object,—what will it be when the veil will be rent, and faith sufficiently exercised will give birth to vision?

II

1. Vision which cannot fail to produce in us the most perfect love; and this is the complementary part of the essential happiness of heaven.

To love without seeing the object of our love, is torment. To see without loving, is fatigue. But to love a God whom we see, and to see a God whom we love; this is the crown of felicity. It is to see and love in Him an object truly worthy of being seen and loved —an object which will make us feel at the first sight the truth of the saying of St. Augustine, that "our hearts were made for God, and they can never rest until they rest in Him." Such will be the first cry of the beatified soul on its entry into bliss. It is there alone that the sight will be satisfied, and that love will be replete. Holy love of a God who is Sanctity

itself, and whom it is infinitely just to love—love, noble, elevated, solid, of the grandest and most accomplished of all beings—love, ardent and tender, of a God who manifests Himself with all the charms that render Him amiable—love pure and tranquil, which can no longer be destroyed by vice, or chilled by fear, or troubled by inconstancy, or lost by indifference—love reciprocal on the part of a God who will love us in return and make us feel that He loves us—love always content, always possessing, always desiring to possess—love embracing in its delicious transports all that can content that delicate faculty of our soul which can find its complete happiness only in the love of its Creator and Sovereign Lord, of its First Beginning and its Last End.

2. Yes, dearly beloved, the Celestial Spouse, while manifesting Himself to us in Heaven with all His charms, will set in motion all those springs of affection which He has set in our souls, and will make them act with all their energy. This heart of ours will cast itself into the arms of its God in order to unite itself to Him with the sensation of a love infinitely delicious and of a joy ineffable. The union will be perfect and indissoluble. By it we shall

become in a sense deified ourselves. We shall judge by His ideas; we shall act by the motions of His will; we shall be in some sort wise by His wisdom; just by His justice; holy by His holiness; perfect by His perfection; happy by His happiness; gods, according to the expression of the Apostle, by being made participators in the Divine Nature. Behold that happy transformation into God which is promised us; that resemblance to God of which the Apostle speaks, which commences on earth by grace, and which is consummated in Heaven by glory. "We shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."

Strive then all your life for the possession of this glory. Bear with resignation, nay, joyously, the fatigues and trials of this spiritual warfare. Look to your Captain and Fellow-Sufferer, Jesus Christ, for strength and inspiration. Contend fearlessly like that generous athlete, St. Paul, who surveying from afar the glorious portals and battlements of the Heavenly Jerusalem, cried out: "Forgetting the things that are behind, I stretch myself forward to the things that are before. I press towards the mark, the prize of the supernal vocation which is in Christ Jesus."

TWENTY-THIRD CONFERENCE

THE SUBSIDIARY JOYS OF HEAVEN

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." (*Rom. VIII, 18.*)

I

1. You will remember that I took occasion when commenting on a passage from the Gospel of the Ascension, to describe in part the glory of the blessed. That glory, I said, consisted essentially in the vision of God, a vision that produces in them the most perfect love.

Now I desire to continue the same subject and to describe some of the subsidiary joys of Heaven. Those joys are the result, in part, of the ineffable beauty of God's house, and of the satisfactions which shall be their portion there; in part, of the dignity and honor to which the saints shall be raised, and of the perpetuity of their state of bliss.

And, first, as to the beauty of Heaven, St. John gives in the Apocalypse a noble description of it. "And I, John," he says, "saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: 'Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. And God himself with them shall be their God.' "— And then he goes on to describe the glory of the New Jerusalem. . . . "And the building of the walls thereof was of jasper stone. And the city itself, pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. And the gates thereof were pearls. And the streets of the city were pure gold, as it were, transparent glass." And he continues, "he saw no temple there, for the Lord, God, Almighty, is the temple thereof, and the Lamb. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb [*i. e.*, Jesus Christ] is the lamp thereof. And the gates thereof shall not be shut by day [at evening], for there is no night there."

2. In this city of the saints old acquaintances suspended by death shall be renewed; friend shall clasp the hand of friend, parents shall be restored to their children, and children to their parents; brother shall meet brother with love; sister shall, as in childhood, twine her arms around the neck of sister. All shall be as brothers and sisters in the love of Jesus Christ.

But, what shall be the satisfactions with which God shall inundate the senses of the just? The eyes shall be regaled with the splendor of the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ. "And I, John," says the Apostle, "saw in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like to the Son of God clothed with a garment down to His feet, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white as white wool, and as snow. And His eyes were as a flame of fire. And His face was as the sun shining in His power."

Beside the throne of her Son shall be seen the peerless beauty of Mary, sitting on a throne of state befitting the Queen of Heaven.

Around, the hierarchies of saints clothed in various-colored garments and wearing crowns of royal magnificence.

The ears shall be rejoiced with concerts of

sweet music, with sounds of supernatural joy and celestial harmony. All the other senses shall have their proper and lawful satisfactions.

But not the senses alone, all the powers of the soul shall participate in the felicity of Paradise. Then shall the soul experience satisfactions so pure, so perfect, sentiments of pleasure so exquisite, that all that the mind of man can conceive the most agreeable can give only an imperfect idea of their sweetness. The soul shall drink in happiness from the bosom of God, that is, at the source itself of sweet sentiments and delights. And those delights which come from God and which come only from Him will be drunk in no longer by drops but in torrents. "Thou shalt make them drunk of the torrent of Thy pleasure."

O dearly beloved, you desire to be happy. Do not you seek your happiness in the false goods of this world, which can never satisfy you? Check yourself for a time. Restrain your ardor in the pursuit of pleasures and try to merit those of Heaven which alone are truly noble and complete. There only will your grandest desires be satisfied.

3. Do you love glory? You will share in

the glory of God Himself. Those stars that now circulate above your head, you shall see revolve beneath your feet. That thunder whose mutterings now humble all creatures, will obey your commands. This earth which is today the greatest theater of human glory, will appear to you but a speck in the magnificence of God.

Do you love pomp and splendor? You will possess Him who created all things grand and noble in the universe. Do you love credit, and authority, and power? You will enter on a heritage of intercession and of conformity in the counsels of the Most High.

But what do I say? Those tastes that you have in this world are yet gross and earthly. They savor of the weakness and imperfection of your nature. They tell more of your slavery to the organs of the body than they are proportioned to the dignity and excellence of the soul. You will have others in Heaven more elevated and expanded and ones which will share more or less in the immensity of God. The soul separated from the body will be wholly absorbed in supernatural enjoyments. Or, if it be again united to it, as it will be after the General Resurrection, it will be no

longer the same body. It will be a glorified body, an impassible body; a body incapable of lassitude, or sickness, or derangement; a body, inaccessible to evil; a body supernaturalized in its tendencies and its qualities by the redundance of glory which shall flood the soul; a body, in a word, which the soul shall assume only to be the organ of the most delightful sensations. "Neither mourning, nor weeping, nor sorrow, shall be any more, because the former things shall have passed away."

"Bless then the Lord, O Holy City of Sion, because God nourishes those that dwell therein with the flower of His most pure delights. He spreads upon their days a sweetness which nothing can trouble; a happiness without cloud, which nothing can obscure." "It is only within your walls that one can cull roses without thorns, and taste sweetness without bitterness."

II

1. But what crowns the felicity of the blessed is this, that one there enjoys a happiness so lasting that it banishes all fear.

Every human happiness here below is essen-

tially fleeting and fragile. Fortune sports with the power of kings, and with the capacity of heroes, and with the valor of warriors, and with the wisdom of statesmen; with the credit of the great, and with the abundance of the rich. It throws aside today those whom it raised up yesterday. It despoils those whom it enriched. It buries in obscurity those whom it caused to appear in splendor. How many changes and failings and disgraces do we not witness every day? Who can count with any appearance of reason on the permanency of his happiness? And even though that happiness dodge all unfortunate circumstances, though it escape all strokes of adverse fortune, can it ever avoid death? Ah, death is the boundary of all human happiness, death is inevitable to all.

In Heaven there is prepared for us a crown whose privilege, incommunicable to all earthly crowns, is perpetuity. There is promised a fixed state of happiness and glory whose duration is measured on the eternity of God. There shines a new sun which knows no decline; a fixed sun which knows only a single day; an eternal day, a day which shall never end. "Oh, how lovely are thy tabernacles, O

Lord, God of hosts? My soul longeth and fainteth after the courts of the Lord." "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord. They shall praise thee for ever and ever."

2. O dearly beloved, is it any wonder that the saints, those most enlightened in spiritual things, felt a longing for the enjoyment of these spiritual delights with which God ravishes the blessed? And can we be surprised if while on earth they bore with patience all the trials of life, when they had in them the hope and the firm confidence of one day being admitted to "the courts of the Lord," for which their labors here on earth prepared them? No, the constancy of the martyrs, the chastity of the virgins, and the austerity of the anchorites; all the sacrifices, all the tears and watches, all the strivings and heroic actions of the saints should not surprise us when we look upon the hope that sustained them. They looked upon Heaven as the term of their labors; the reward of their sorrows, infinite enjoyment; the crown of their patience, the possession of the Eternal God.

Aspire then like them to this infinite and eternal happiness, and spare neither labor nor

sacrifice that you may obtain it. Begin from this day the "ascent of virtue" whose summit ends in glory; that the praises of the Psalmist may be applied to you. "Blessed is the man who hath disposed in his heart to ascend by steps in this vale of tears to the place which God hath set. The blessing of the Lawgiver shall be upon him. He shall go from virtue to virtue, till the God of gods shall be seen in Sion. For, the Lord of hosts . . . shall not deprive of good things those that walk in innocence."

LAUS DEO SEMPER

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